DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 287 CE 082 766

AUTHOR Dumbrell, Tom; de Montfort, Rowena; Finnegan, Wendy
TITLE Outcomes for Vocational Education and Training Diploma and Associate Diploma Students.
INSTITUTION National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook (Australia).
ISBN ISBN-0-87397-776-9
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 65p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, South Australia 5068, Australia (Cat no. 704; $33 Australian). Tel: 08 8333 8400; Fax: 08 8331 9211; e-mail: vet_req@ncver.edu.au; Web site: http://www.ncver.edu.au. For full text: http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr9027.pdf.
PUB TYPE Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Persistence; Adult Dropouts; Associate Degrees; Developed Nations; Education Work Relationship; *Employment Patterns; Foreign Countries; Graduate Surveys; *Graduates; Learning Modules; Learning Motivation; Occupational Aspiration; *Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; School Holding Power; Secondary Education; Student Characteristics; *Student Motivation; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; Australia (Adelaide); Australia (Melbourne); Australia (Sydney)

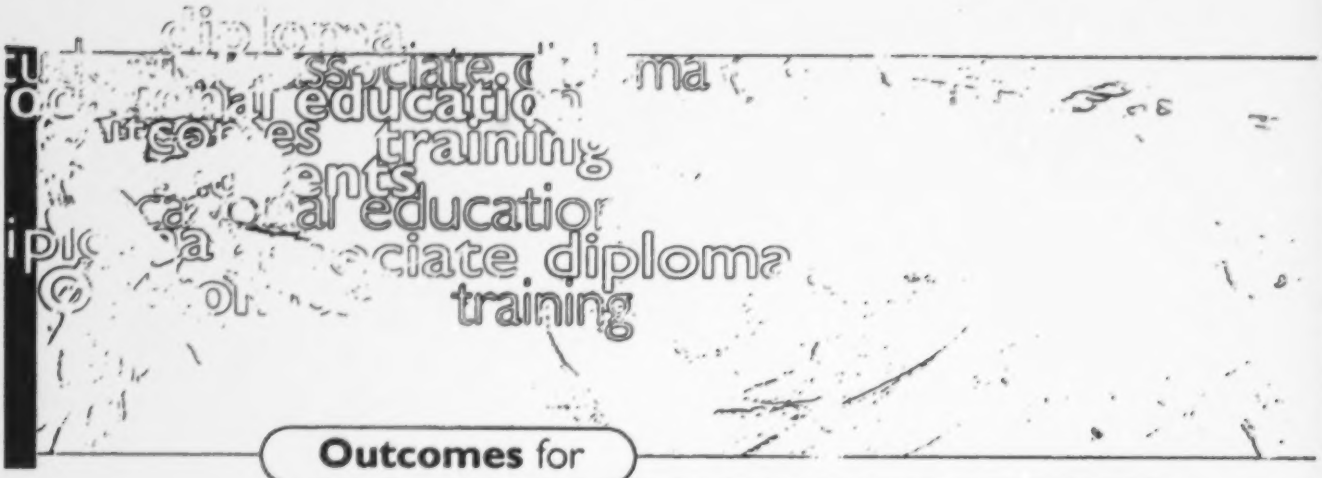
ABSTRACT

A study examined outcomes for graduates and module completers who studied in associate diploma, diploma, and advanced diploma courses, using data from the 1999 Student Outcomes Survey, together with focus groups in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide. One aim was to determine whether module completers had different training needs than graduates; another was to examine whether some module completers undertake the course merely to complete certain modules. A literature review found little research specifically focused on outcomes for diploma level students. Analysis indicated module completers and graduates had similar characteristics, with similar field of study profiles and similar employment outcomes; module completers were twice as likely to report they did not achieve their main reason for undertaking the study; while both graduates and module completers were primarily motivated to study for vocational reasons, module completers were more likely to be study for reasons related to their current job; training-related reasons accounted for about one-third of the main reasons for module completers not continuing to study; and graduates were more likely to want either to get a job or to change their job. (Appendixes include 22 references and focus group results and discussion guide.) (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 460 287

NCVER



Outcomes for vocational education and training diploma and associate diploma students

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. Hayman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2B

T Dumbrell
R de Montfort
W Finnegan

CE082766

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Outcomes for **vocational education** and **training** **diploma** and **associate diploma students**

Tom Dumbrell

Rowena de Montfort

Wendy Finnegan

NCVER

© **Australian National Training Authority, 2001**

This work has been produced by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) with the assistance of funding provided by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). It is published by NCVER under licence from ANTA. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this publication may be reported by any process without the written permission of NCVER Ltd. Requests should be made in writing to NCVER Ltd.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian National Training Authority.

ISBN 0 87397 776 9 print edition

ISBN 0 87397 777 7 web edition

TD/TNC 67.18

Published by NCVER

ABN 87 007 967 311

252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, SA 5068
PO Box 115, Kensington Park, SA 5068, Australia
www.ncver.edu.au

Contents

List of tables and figures 4
Executive summary 5
Introduction 7
Methodology 9
Insights from the literature 10
Findings 17
Overview of characteristics of graduates and module completers 17
Field of study 22
Reasons for undertaking study 23
Did graduates and module completers achieve their main aims? 24
Why did module completers not continue? 27
Do module completers intend to complete the course? 28
Students' rating of course quality 29
Employment outcomes 30
Conclusions 37
References 40
Appendix 1 41
Appendix 2 47
Appendix 3 56

List of tables and figures

Tables

Table 1: Age profile of graduates and module completers (%) 17
Table 2: Prior highest educational qualification held, graduates and module completers (%) 18
Table 3: Diploma graduates—employment outcomes summary (%) 19
Table 4: Diploma graduates—industry of employment by sex as at 28 May 1999 (%) 19
Table 5: Industry of employment, graduates and module completers (%) 21
Table 6: Field of study, diploma graduates and module completers, number and % 22
Table 7: Main reasons for study, graduates and module completers (%) 24
Table 8: Did your training help you to achieve your main reason for doing the training? (%) 25
Table 9: Main reason for doing course by whether achieved that objective, number and percentage 26
Table 10: Reasons for discontinuing by whether training helped achieve main aim, module completers (%) 27
Table 11: Module completers—summary reasons for not continuing by age group (%) 28
Table 12: Module completers—intention to complete their training course, persons (%) 28
Table 13: Module completers—reasons for not continuing by whether intending to complete course (%) 29
Table 14: Most important area of service delivery, graduates and module completers (%) 30
Table 15: Summary labour market outcomes, graduates and module completers (%) 31
Table 16: Employment outcomes, diploma graduates by field of study (%) 31
Table 17: Employment outcomes, module completers, by field of study (%) 32
Table 18: Occupational outcomes, graduates and module completers by major ASCO group, (%) 34
Table 19: Occupational outcomes by gender, diploma graduates and module completers (%) 35
Table 20: Industry of employment when surveyed, by industry division (%) 36
Table 21: Module completers—intention to complete, by sex, by reason for not completing 57
Table 22: Graduates and module completers—employment outcome by field of study 58
Table 23: Employment outcomes by gender and industry, graduates and module completers, numbers and percentages 59

Figures

Figure 1: Participation in training courses by highest educational qualification, 1997 12
Figure 2: Field of study, diploma graduates, module completers and total enrolments (%) 23
Figure 3: Earnings profile, graduates and module completers, number earning that amount within each earnings range 33

Executive summary

This study examines outcomes for graduates and module completers who studied in associate diploma, diploma and advanced diploma courses, using data from the 1999 Student Outcomes Survey (SOS), together with a series of focus groups convened in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. For convenience, these courses are generally all referred to as diplomas in this report. One aim of the study is to determine whether module completers have different training needs to those graduating in these courses. The hypothesis is that if there appear to be differences between graduates and module completers, it might be possible either to redesign some courses or to develop new courses that would better meet the needs of those not completing existing courses.

The SOS is a large-scale questionnaire survey of technical and further education (TAFE) students who completed at least either a certificate course or 'modules' (subjects) from such courses. The collection of outcomes data on module completers in this survey allows, for the first time, some examination of the characteristics of students enrolling in vocational education and training (VET) courses but leaving before completion. One issue that this study aims to examine is whether there are module completers who are undertaking the course merely to complete certain modules, in the way some people undertake short training courses outside the formal VET system.

A review of the literature has found little research specifically focussed on outcomes for diploma level students, particularly those enrolling in but not completing such courses. The literature on outputs and outcomes tends to focus on the debate over how much weight should be given to economic outcomes (such as employment, earnings and skills matching labour market demand) and other educational and social outcomes.

This analysis indicates that module completers and graduates from diploma courses have similar characteristics, having similar field of study profiles and similar employment outcomes. One marked difference, however, is that module completers are twice as likely as graduates to report that they did not achieve their main reason for undertaking their study. In this regard, module completers from diploma courses are also quite different from module completers from other courses.

The main findings from the analysis of data are:

- Graduates and module completers from diploma courses are more likely to be employed than are all TAFE graduates. Overall employment outcomes were very similar, with about 78% of graduates and 77% of module completers employed when surveyed. Diploma module completers were more likely to possess a university qualification and were a little older than diploma graduates.
- Graduates and module completers from diploma courses resemble each other more than they resemble all VET graduates. Their fields of study patterns are similar and their employment outcomes, by occupation and industry, are also very similar. One exception is that module completers were less likely than diploma graduates to be employed in the Health and community services industry division.
- Module completers in diploma courses were much less likely than either module completers from all courses or diploma graduates to have achieved their main reason for undertaking study. Just under half of all module completers across all courses indicated that their study had helped them to achieve their main aim. Only about 30% of module

completers from diploma courses, however, reported this outcome, whereas more than 62% of diploma graduates said that they had achieved their main aim.

- Despite this, 30% fewer than 6% of the module completer respondents said that their *main* reason for discontinuing was either because they had gained what they wanted from the training or that they had got the skills they needed for their job.
- While both graduates and module completers were primarily motivated to study for vocational reasons, module completers were more likely to be studying for reasons related to their current job. Graduates, however, were more likely to be job seekers (that is, either unemployed and seeking a job or employed but wanting to change their job). Module completers were, however, also more likely to be motivated to study for personal reasons.
- Module completers and graduates studied in similar fields of study. The main difference appears to be in the Health and community services field of study with fewer module completers, a finding apparently consistent with the industry of employment outcome, where graduates were relatively more likely to find employment than module completers.
- Training-related reasons account for about one-third of the main reasons for module completers not continuing to study.
- Module completers who wanted to change their career were much less successful than graduates in achieving this aim.

The analysis of data suggests that module completers from diploma courses are different from module completers in other courses in some respects, especially field of study and in achievement of main aims. They are, however, quite similar to diploma graduates in their employment outcomes, although they are more likely to be studying for reasons related to their current employment. Graduates, on the other hand, are more likely to be either wanting to get a job or to change their job.

There seems to be scope, therefore, to explore further the issue of whether some diploma courses could be presented in different modes, perhaps more explicitly designed for those currently in the workforce. These diploma courses are particularly those in which relatively large proportions of module completers were evident and appeared to enjoy positive employment outcomes. While the small sample of module completers in the 1999 SOS limits the extent to which such students can be identified, it does seem that module completers in business and administration, and perhaps several other fields, achieve good employment outcomes without achieving the complete qualification. It is suggested that further, more targeted, research should examine module completers in these fields of study.

There is also scope to investigate why such large proportions of module completers from diploma courses are not achieving their main aim in undertaking study and how these aims could be better addressed.

Introduction

Governments, both in Australia and in other developed economies, have, in recent years, shown a much greater interest in the return on public investment in many areas of government, including education and training. Systems have been developed in Australia to provide a range of information on the outputs of the system and outcomes for those graduating from longer vocational education and training (VET) courses using the Graduate Destination Survey. More recently, the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training (NCVER) has developed the Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) to capture data on a wider range of VET students, including those completing modules but not completing a whole course.

With the growth in the range of post-school educational options there has also been a growing interest among potential students on the personal returns on training investment, especially their likely vocational outcomes. From the broad community perspective, the VET system has been seen as one key strategy in addressing the problem of chronic youth unemployment and, from the perspective of business, there has been strong pressure on the VET system to produce outcomes that match the labour market needs of industry.

There has been strong ideological and political debate over recent years between those (e.g. Gonczi 1998) who believe industry's growing influence on VET has produced a simplistic and mechanistic approach to vocational education and those who believe that vocational education is an instrument of economic policy. There are also several commentators such as Seddon (1998) and Schofield (1997) who have sought a reconciliation of these views.

Seddon suggests that the situation is not a simple one of progressives versus conservatives:

> *However, this dichotomy between enthusiastic, entrepreneurial advocates and despondent, high-minded critics of educational re-design is somewhat misleading. In some 'practical' curriculum areas which were involved in direct training of industry-employed students, and in which CBT [competency-based training] and an emphasis on commercial activities had generally been embraced, we found some of the most profound (to us) thinking about issues such as pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation. These data give some indication of the complexity of responses at Streeton to the current educational re-design, but also indicate that the professional educational discourses of the 1970s and 1980s, now dismissed by some organisational players, may have penetrated quite deeply into general educational thinking in TAFE.*

Schofield was also less prepared than some to conclude a simple dichotomy on an equity versus efficiency basis, saying: 'there is more common ground between social justice and an efficient training market than current debate allows'.

In 1996 the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Performance Review Committee (PRC) commissioned the NCVER to look at measurements of VET output:

> *The conclusion reached following the consultations and research undertaken by the NCVER is that the primary measurement of VET output needs to occur at the level below attainment of full qualifications. The majority of VET participants undertake shorter programs to attain particular skills or competencies relevant to their current or future work. Only some undertake full programs leading to a recognised qualification.* (NCVER 1998)

It follows that if outputs should be measured below the level of full qualifications, so, too, should outcomes. One aspect of VET outcomes that has not until recently been explored in much depth has been the outcomes actually sought by students compared with the outcomes—usually expressed in terms of course completion—expected by the 'system'. A recent study for the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC) undertaken by Foyster, Fai and Shah (2000) shows that substantial proportions of students appear to undertake VET only to complete certain modules. Their paper also shows that completion rates for longer courses, typically diploma and associate diploma courses, are very low, and that most outcomes are likely to be 'partial completers'.

It is important to recognise that module completers are the norm for the VET system. In 1998 there were more than twice as many module completers as there were technical and further education (TAFE) graduates across Australia (NCVER 1999b, which identified 113 300 graduates compared to about 246 000 module completers). As NCVER points out (NCVER 1999a, p.1), graduates and module completers 'are two very distinct sets of students'. This characteristic appears to reflect one of the features of VET in Australia; that is, its capacity to meet the needs of a wide range of users.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data in *Transition from Education to Work, Australia* 1997 (6227.0) show that while there were 113 500 persons enrolled in associate diploma courses in March–May 1997, there were just under 380 000 persons throughout Australia who possessed such a qualification. Such a ratio indicates that low completion rates are likely to have been the norm for many years.

There is growing competition between VET institutions and universities over this market segment, and, therefore, analysis that allows the VET sector to understand better the needs of students in this segment should enhance the sector's capacity to provide a more competitive product. As diploma courses generally represent the high cost end of VET provision, governments are especially concerned to see that this provision is efficiently and economically provided.

Given that there appears to be a considerable dissonance between the outcomes expected by VET providers in relation to longer courses and the outcomes apparently sought and achieved by students, there appears to be value in examining this inconsistency.

The changing nature of the Australian labour market, especially the decentralisation of industrial relations, has meant that once common job titles as defined in industrial awards no longer exist or are much more divergent in their content. Jobs generally are becoming much more fluid in their content, and, consequently, formal educational qualifications need to assume an equal level of fluidity to be relevant to the labour market.

The low completion rates of longer duration courses suggests that some students might be responding to the more fluid labour market by mixing and matching bits of skills/knowledge from a range of sources, and that the format of many diploma courses might no longer meet the needs of many students. If a new paradigm for the structure and presentation of VET courses could be developed, there would be benefits to students and VET providers through both reduced costs and greater relevance. This study aims to be an initial exploration of some of these themes.

Methodology

Data used throughout this report are derived from weighted data from the 1999 NCVER SOS. Weightings used are the same as those used in other published NCVER material on the 1999 SOS. The weighted population estimates comprised 20 781 graduates from an associate diploma, diploma or advanced diploma VET course and 18 870 module completers who had been enrolled in such courses.

The original 1999 SOS sample of graduates and module completers from diploma, associate diploma and advanced diploma courses included 11 320 graduates and just 370 module completers. The small size of the sample of module completers necessarily limits the conclusions that can be drawn from cells containing small numbers. A T-test has been applied using these sample sizes (rather than population estimates quoted in tables) to indicate significant findings.

The NCVER 1999 SOS is a large-scale survey of students who successfully undertook VET at a TAFE institute in 1999. In addition to its forerunner, the Graduate Destination Survey, its coverage includes students who successfully completed part but not all of a course of certificate level or higher, which was at least 200 hours or one semester in duration. The survey is partitioned according to two groups: graduates, who completed a full course at TAFE and module completers, who completed at least one module of a course. NCVER (NCVER 1999a) provides an analysis of the SOS which revealed a number of distinguishing features of graduates and module completers. However, unlike the current study, which focussed on diploma students, the NCVER SOS analysis encompasses all levels of qualifications.

In this study, a comparative analysis was conducted of responses to the SOS for the two subsets of students: graduates and module completers. The analysis was limited to those completing or undertaking modules within associate diploma, diploma or advanced diploma courses. These courses were combined and are referred to as diplomas throughout the report. No distinctions are made in the report between these three qualifications.

Selected data made available by NCVER was analysed according to gender, field of study, post-school qualifications, reason for study, whether aims were achieved, reasons for discontinuing, labour force status, employment outcomes (including earnings) and opinions of course.

Stage 2 of the study followed up key issues arising from the quantitative analysis through the conduct of three focus groups of former students. The groups, convened in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, consisted of diploma level graduates and module completers from a wide range of fields of study and courses. Each group was a mixture of gender, age range, employed, unemployed or not in the labour force.

The main issue explored was whether the needs and intentions of graduates and module completers varied according to individual's decisions to undertake TAFE study, decisions to continue/discontinue and outcomes of studying. The interview guide used for the focus group discussions is attached as appendix 2.

Insights from the literature

A significant body of literature has been built up in the late 1990s addressing the questions relating to the measuring of outputs and outcomes. Debate has taken place over who constitutes the primary VET client and, therefore, what the most appropriate measure of output is. VET students and employers have been surveyed to measure employment outcomes. The available literature, however, generally applies to VET participants at all qualification levels, rather than focussing on students who have studied diploma level courses. Unless specified, therefore, comments in this section apply to all students in VET.

ABS 1996 Census data shows many persons in skilled jobs do not hold formal qualifications and, overall, less than 50% of the Australian population holds a formal qualification. The proportion not holding formal qualifications is high for labourers (76.9%), advanced clerical and service workers (59.2%), managers and administrators (39.4%) and associate professionals (45.7%). Many of those in the last three categories are in occupations towards which advanced diploma, diploma and associate diploma courses are targeted. Why there are such high levels of a lack of formal qualifications among these groups is not examined in this paper; however, it is likely that age is a contributing factor.

In 1996 just over half of students enrolling in VET were in programs leading to full qualifications (as opposed to 'sub-qualification' level training—statements of attainment, certificates of competency, certificates of proficiency, endorsement to certificates and non-award category training). However, many of those enrolled in full courses are only seeking skills from part of the course and have no immediate intention of gaining full qualifications.

> *VET participants are typically already employed and over 25 years of age. More often than not they are undertaking VET in smaller 'bits' to gain particular skills, rather than doing a full program leading to a qualification. Typically, they are seeking to enhance their work skills.*
>
> *This argument is not to suggest that people undertaking VET think that qualifications are unimportant. To the contrary, it is highly likely that most people want their VET activity to articulate to a full qualification even if they have no intention of undertaking a full qualification at this particular point in time.* (NCVER 1998)

Anderson (1997a), in discussing the large expansion in the training of operatives, in basic employment and educational preparation, and for associate diploma qualifications, suggests that it is difficult from the data to gauge the extent to which the rapid growth has led to close orientation to employer needs. If this is the case, it might also suggest that the associate diploma level programs are perhaps not fulfilling students' needs for training. He argues that the individual student must be seen as the 'front line consumer' in VET, paying more in 'students fees and charges' than industry does in 'fee for service' and forming the largest group of non-government purchasers or indirect consumers in the public VET sector which:

> *highlights the need for VET providers and the system as a whole to recognise and respond to the diverse needs, aspirations and destinations of students and end-users of the skills acquired through training, both as participants and non-participants in the labour market.* (Anderson 1997)

Two reasons for partial completion of VET courses were put forward by the ANTA PRC project (NCVER 1998):

- people undertaking VET making the transition to employment at an early stage rather than completing a full program and qualifying, or

- students transferring from VET into higher education to get a university qualification, utilising credit transfer arrangements to get credit for successfully completed VET modules

There was some support for the first of these conjectures from the series of focus groups undertaken for this study, although not for the second.

The NCVER 1999 SOS, which surveys students who successfully undertook VET at a TAFE institute in 1998, looks at such circumstances more closely. In addition to its forerunner, the Graduate Destination Survey, it covers students who successfully completed part but not all of a course of at least 200 hours or one semester in duration. The survey therefore is divided into two groups: graduates, who completed a full course at TAFE and module completers, who completed at least a module of a course.

In general, the SOS found that module completers undertook a shorter length of training, were more likely to be male, and were older than graduate respondents. Also, more reported a disability, a higher proportion had a previous qualification and a smaller proportion lived in a capital city. Graduates were more likely to be recent school leavers. The SOS also shows that graduates from all courses were more likely to be employed, while module completers were more likely not to be in the labour force. The findings from the present research study shown later in this report reveal that graduates and module completers from diploma courses do not match these outcomes for all graduates and module completers.

A study of module completion rates in Western Australia (NCVER 1999c) found that student characteristics were the most important factors in predicting student module completion, being slightly more important than program delivery issues. The Western Australian study was not limited to associate diploma and diploma students as is this project.

It showed very low completion rates for indigenous students, and students undertaking adult literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. It also found lower rates of completion existed for students with non-English-speaking backgrounds, early school leavers, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Contrary to indicators in this research that graduates tended to be recent school leavers (and therefore 'first-timers' in VET), the study also found low completion rates for those undertaking VET for the first time. Using regression tree analysis, it found that the most important indicators of module completion were the previous education level and mode of participation, with course level and segment also important indicators.

Graduates in the SOS saw an improvement of 8.2 percentage points in the proportion employed before and after study, with an increase in the proportion employed full-time and a decline in the group working part-time. Data for module completers were less clear, with an increase of 2.9 percentage points in their total employment. Whether this saw the same outcomes as graduates is not known as the increase was recorded in those not showing their employment status.

A valuable source of information on participation in both formal and informal training is the ABS *Education and training experience, Australia* (ABS 1997). This study distinguishes structured work-related training, which may have been undertaken internally or externally, from formal VET delivered as part of the government-funded system delivered through TAFE and other providers. Analysis of unpublished data from this survey's confidentialised unit record files by the author (Dumbrell 2000) has revealed an unusual pattern of participation in non-award, short training courses by VET graduates. These findings suggest that VET graduates might use TAFE courses in the way that non-TAFE graduates use short courses provided by employers, industry and professional associations and other providers.

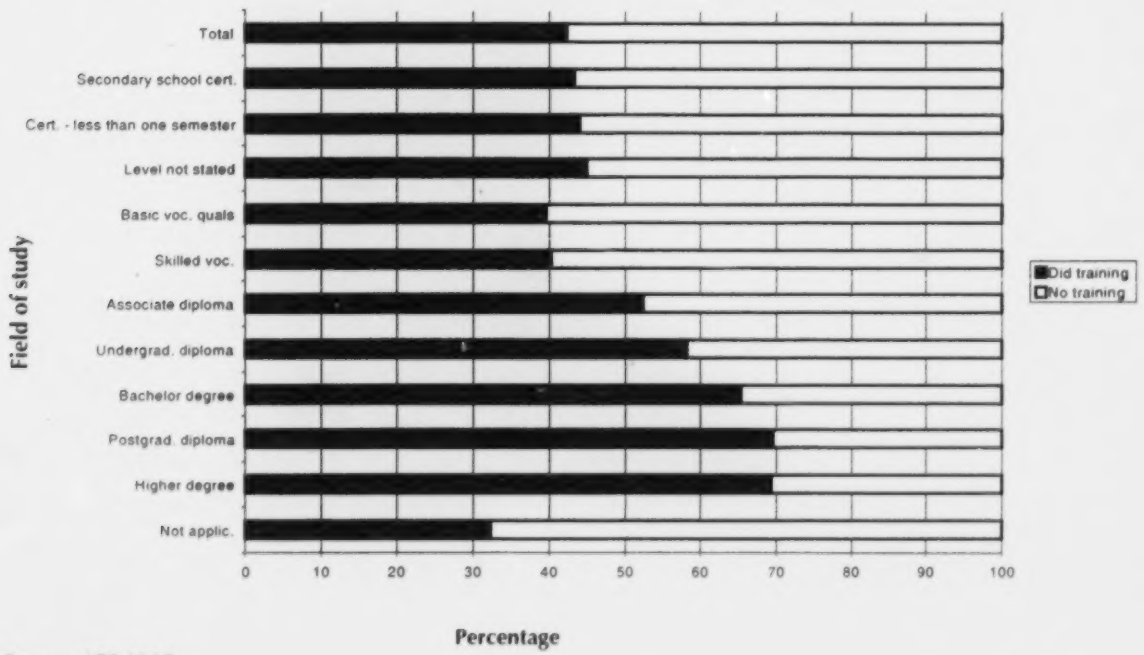
Education and training experience, Australia shows that over 60% of the population surveyed had undertaken some on-the-job training during the previous 12 months, while over 70% had undertaken some form of training (including enrolment in formal education qualifications). That survey distinguished between participation in 'training courses' and participation in a formal VET course, which was classified as enrolment in education. Hence, references to

'training courses' from the survey of *Education and training experience, Australia* are separate from information on training collected through the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMIS) system and thus information collected via the SOS.

The total number of hours in 'training courses', almost 130 million contact hours in 1997, compares with about 300 million contact hours recorded in the formal VET context. Hence, according to these figures, structured vocational learning beyond the formal VET system is around 43% of the size of the formal VET system as measured by contact hours.

The *Education and training experience, Australia* survey found that those in higher level occupations and those with university qualifications are much more likely to have undertaken a 'training course' than those with VET or no post-school qualifications. The following chart, based on data from the *Education and Training Experience, Australia* survey shows the level of participation in training by level of highest educational qualification.

Figure 1: Participation in training courses by highest educational qualification, 1997



Source: ABS 1997

It is possible that the apparently low level of training course participation by those with a VET qualification shown in figure 1 could be partly explained by their undertaking VET modules as part of a formal VET course rather than through a short training course. It is known (NCVER 1999a) that many students enrolled in VET courses only intend to complete modules, that they often already hold a VET qualification and that many achieve their vocational objectives through this route.

The *Education and training experience, Australia* survey also shows that nationally the TAFE system has apparently only a limited share of the 'training course' market. TAFE captured only 5.3% of this market according to the ABS, with in-house provision representing by far the largest market segment at around 58.6%. Professional and industry associations with 11.3% and other private training organisations with 9.1% of the market were the other major providers. For the reasons discussed above, it is possible that the TAFE system's real market share in the short course training market is being disguised through the current division of

training between that delivered through the formal education sector and that delivered as 'training courses' by the non-formal providers.

It seems that this situation is an example of what Robinson (1999) referred to as the need to define and develop 'adult pathways'. He pointed out (p.27) that:

> *So much of our current approach is based on the assumption that our main learners are entry-level learners requiring long bouts of initial education and training. This has meant a predominant focus in post-compulsory education and training in Australia has been on full degree or diploma programs done by full or part-time students. The logistics of developing new education and training programs that are more capable of facilitating continuous and rapid learning in the new skills will require a very different and more diverse approach with new learning options and pathways.*

Robinson concludes in that paper (p.31):

> *The provision of genuine and practical new structured learning pathways for people irrespective of their age will not be an easy task. It will require the evolution of new systems of recording and packaging people's learning irrespective of whether that learning took place in a university or in the vocational education and training sector, and irrespective of whether it took place in a recognised program in or out of Australia. In turn this will mean the evolution of genuinely consistent national assessment and learning recognition arrangements that cuts across sectors so that the individual's learning can 'seamlessly' accumulate and articulate into national qualifications.*

One barrier to achieving this seamlessness that Robinson advocates might be the artificial distinction between what is measured currently as formal participation in education and training and participation in 'training courses' as defined by the ABS.

The degree to which employment is the reason for undertaking VET is an issue of contention. Anderson (1998) sees: 'Students' motives for enrolling in TAFE were typically more diverse and their expectations much wider than just gaining job-related skills'.

Golding and Volkoff (1998) investigated motivations and initial experiences of people undertaking VET in 1996. They found complex and varied reasons for study and different feelings about VET. Particular problems were encountered by those displaced from the workforce, trying to re-enter it, including periods of non-participation, further VET, unemployment, part-time work and underemployment. Further, more than over half of those with prior post-school education were commencing their third or subsequent training episode, and that 'for those with prior post-secondary study experience, current and prior fields are often far from parallel'.

Dyer and Wyn (1998) surveyed Victorian school students in 1991 and 1992, comparing intentions and realities of study/employment aspirations. They found complicated mixes of study, work and family life existed for many youth in a youth labour market in crisis. They established that young people, especially young men, found that the experience of VET gave them 'space in which they could bring into focus the hazy ideas they had about their lives'. Females tended to approach this transition with a wider range of issues. They tended to focus on the type of job, but also showed a readiness to change direction: 'maintaining a vision of their future, using the present to build a base for that future and being ready to take up opportunities that might occur'. About 50% of the respondents needed or preferred a combination of work and study, and how they accommodated this was varied: 'There are different ways of combining work and study, and importantly different meanings of the combinations which are negotiated and balanced'.

Golding and Volkoff (1998) listed eight reasons for undertaking VET:

- to get a job—for various reasons
- to gain necessary or extra skills for their present job—to formalise skills, or be able to do the work now paid for, e.g. accounting etc.
- to get a better job, promotion or higher pay—all three may be inter linked—or individual
- to move into a new career—because of perceptions, practicalities etc.

- to get into another course of study—for long-term or short-term goals
- because of an external requirement—government, penal or health imposed
- to enhance family or social caring skills—literacy, computer literacy, language study, and/or
- to enhance personal/living skills—challenge, socialise, hobbies, or to save money

Their study (Golding & Volkoff 1998) showed motivations for reasons connected with a broader and more integrated education than the very specific, directly work and industry-related training often assumed.

However, the SOS found that all graduates were far more likely to be studying for work reasons than for any other reasons (79% of graduates and 66.5% of module completers). Over a quarter of graduates (27.1%) studied to get a job or their own business compared to 18.6% of all module completers and 14.0% of graduates studied to get extra skills compared to 20.3% of module completers. Conversely, only 20.3% of graduates in the SOS studied for non-vocational reasons compared to 31.1% of module completers.

Anderson (1997b) recognises the importance of employment outcomes for TAFE students, but he emphasised the 'diverse needs, aspirations and destinations of students and end-users of the skills acquired through training, both as participants and non-participants in the labour market'.

He (Anderson 1998) also regards the major issues for students as: 'Students' motives for enrolling in TAFE were typically more diverse and their expectations much wider than just gaining job-related skills.'

This notion of diverse needs, aspirations and destination is supported by Ferrier (1998), who argued that the focus of user choice on employer outcomes caused Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples not to complete their programs. She said that their motivation was not necessarily to get employment *per se*, but often to get skills important to use in community-based projects. Whether this argument extends to other groups is not known.

VET is also seen as a pathway to further study, either in the VET or university sector. It is suggested by Burke (1998) that anomalies in funding, specifically government funding of TAFE for various reasons (such as for access and equity purposes), allows some students to take subjects that can be used for credits for university, which incurs HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme). This hypothesis could be applied to courses at the advanced diploma, diploma and associate diploma course level. While the rather limited number of participants in the focus groups that formed part of this study did not give this as a reason for becoming a module completer, this issue would be worth further examination. Among the 39 former students who participated in the focus groups for this current study, selected by independent market research companies, a surprisingly high ten were university graduates, suggesting more that university was a pathway to VET for many students. This is a much higher proportion of graduates than among all VET graduates surveyed in the 1999 SOS, where less than 9% of students were university graduates.

The NCVER analysis showed that at all levels of qualification within the SOS graduate respondents were more likely than module completers to express satisfaction with their courses. They were more likely to report being happy with training and achieving their reasons for study (79.4%) than were module completers (71.4%).

For both graduates and module completers, those who were most satisfied included those training for non-vocational reasons, those training as part of a job requirement and those who were employed at the time of the survey. Similarly, for both groups those least satisfied were unemployed, particularly those looking for full-time employment and whose main reason was to get a job or to try for a different career.

The most common reasons indicated by module completers in general for not continuing to study were employment or training related (rather than 'personal') and were 'satisfied'

responses. That is, their responses indicated that they had achieved at least some of the original aims in undertaking the study. Nearly one in four (24.3%) reported they had gained what they wanted from training, 15.9% had changed or started new jobs, and 15.7% had gained the skills needed for their job. Personal reasons were also important, with 13.8% reporting too many pressures on time and 9.7% reporting family reasons. Reasons for not completing a course generally do not seem to be related to dissatisfaction with the course. Only 6.7% cited problems with training timetables or training meeting expectations as main reasons for discontinuing.

Anderson (1997b) in a survey of student perceptions of TAFE student services states that career development and employment services (which are seen as having the greatest importance to certificate, advanced certificate and associate diploma course students) 'perform a crucial role in assisting students clarify and realise their vocational goals'. He goes on to say that students in advanced certificate and associate diploma courses report considerably more dissatisfaction with the provision of these services.

> *The study suggests for instance that the support needs of full-time associate diploma students differ significantly from those of apprentices and trainees who attend TAFE on block release or part-time basis.*

The level of support for students in these courses could be a key issue in their decisions to drop out of courses.

The NCVER SOS provides information on employment outcomes for graduates and module completers. Questions relating to employment status, promotions or advancement in work, industry of employment and income were asked within the survey. Results for the whole surveyed population show greater job-related outcomes for graduates than their module completer peers. Specific findings for those in diploma courses were different to these findings, with module completers from diploma courses achieving similar outcomes to diploma graduates. Findings in relation to diploma graduates and module completers are presented later in this report. Unless specified, the findings related in this section refer to all respondents regardless of qualification level of course being undertaken.

After their training, graduates were more likely to be employed, with 72.8% reporting employment compared to 67.5% of module completers. Most of this difference was in full-time employment accounting for 23.9% of graduate respondents and 19.3% of module completers. The proportion of respondents reporting being unemployed was 13.0%, the same for both graduates and module completers.

On a State basis, employment outcomes were highest for graduates in South Australia (80.6%) and lowest in New South Wales (70.8%). For module completers, the greatest employment outcomes were achieved in the Northern Territory (77.8% reporting employment after training), with the lowest again in New South Wales (63.7% of respondents reporting employment).

Associate diploma, diploma, AQF diploma and advanced diploma graduates reported relatively high levels of employment after their graduation (83.5%, 82.8%, 77.2% and 74.5% respectively) compared to 92.6% of trade certificate students (the highest level reported). Module completers studying at a diploma level (including associate and advanced diploma students) also reported high levels of employment in comparison to those studying toward other qualifications (77.1% reporting employment compared to 67.5% of other students).

Graduates were more likely to move to higher skilled occupations after training. Nearly a quarter of graduates (23.2%) employed before training achieved a higher skilled occupational outcome compared to only 10.6% of module completers. Similarly, 16.1% of graduates achieved promotion or an increase in status compared to 9.1% of module completers. This finding, however, obscures the fact that module completers were more likely to be in higher status occupations before commencing their studies. After finishing training, 16.7% of all module completers were working as managers/administrators or professionals compared to 14.7% of all graduates.

A mixed pattern exists in regard to income. Module completers earned more after training than graduates, with average weekly incomes of $486.00 compared to $462.00; however, graduates were more likely to achieve an *increase* in earnings after study (23.6% of graduates reporting this compared to 8.8% of module completers). This difference would be partially explained by the younger age of graduates and their shorter length of time in the work place.

The industry distribution of employment for all graduates and module completers was very similar, with the four main industries of employment being Manufacturing, Retailing, Property and business services and Health and community services.

Overall the research conducted for this project has highlighted differences between students undertaking diploma level courses and all VET students. Moreover it contributes to the literature on VET outcomes and raises some specific issues in relation to the definitions of VET, the need to consider alternative modes of presentation of modules within some diploma courses, and some marked gender differences in outcomes for diploma level students.

Findings

The comments in this section generally are based on two sources:

- an analysis of selected data provided by NCVER on those graduates and module completers who had enrolled in associate diploma, diploma and advanced diploma courses in 1998 and
- the three focus groups conducted by the researchers in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide

Overview of characteristics of graduates and module completers

For the sake of brevity, graduates with diplomas, advanced diplomas and associate diplomas are referred to as 'diploma graduates' in this report. The characteristics of diploma graduates and module completers varied to some extent from the characteristics of all TAFE graduates surveyed in the SOS.

One of the features of the following analysis is the marked similarity in most respects between diploma graduates and diploma module completers. This similarity suggests that findings (such as NCVER 1999a) in relation to module completer characteristics based on all VET students might not apply to those completing modules in diploma level courses. (See in particular the Field of Study section below.) Where comments are made in this chapter on significant differences between the two population samples (i.e. diploma graduates and diploma module completers) a t-test has been applied at the 5% level of significance.

Diploma graduates and module completers show a significant difference in their age. Graduates overall were on average younger and more likely than module completers to be in the 20–24 age group, while module completers were more common in the age groups either side of this group. Nevertheless more than 50% of both groups were in the under 30 categories.

Table 1: Age profile of graduates and module completers (%)

Age group	Graduates %	Module completers %
15 to 19 years	4.4	8.3
20 to 24 years	39.1	24.8
25 to 29 years	14.4	19.9
30 to 34 years	9.4	14.6
35 to 39 years	10.2	11.9
40 to 44 years	8.6	7.7
45 to 49 years	5.8	5.9
50 to 54 years	3.1	2.2
55 and over	1.5	3.3
Not stated/refused	3.5	1.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Module completers in the survey already held higher educational qualifications when they began their course than did the diploma graduates. More than 13% of module completers from diploma courses held a bachelor's degree or higher prior to their course, whereas fewer than 8% of diploma graduates were similarly qualified. Diploma graduates were, however, more likely than module completers (52% versus 46%) to hold some other form of post-school qualification. (T-test significant 5% for both.)

Table 2: Prior highest educational qualification held, graduates and module completers (%)

Highest qualification held	Graduates %	Module completers %
Bachelor degree or higher	7.5	13.7
Undergraduate diploma	4.6	2.7
Associate diploma	6.8	7.7
Trade certificate (apprenticeship)	7.3	10.1
Traineeship	1.5	1.0
Technician's certificate	0.8	0.5
Advanced certificate	7.0	6.8
Nursing certificate	1.1	0.4
Other certificate	13.0	9.6
Certificate competency/proficiency	1.7	3.5
Statement of attainment	1.6	0.6
Pre-vocational training	0.9	0.3
Secondary school qual	1.9	0.3
Other	3.8	1.7
None	37.8	36.1
Not stated/refused	2.8	4.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Diploma graduates and module completers had higher rates of full-time employment than did all surveyed graduates. Module completers in diploma courses were also more likely than all module completers to have studied for vocational reasons.

Diploma module completers were much less likely (T-test significant at 5% level) than diploma graduates (29% versus 62%) to have achieved their main reason for studying. Module completers in diploma courses in particular were also much less likely than all module completers (29% versus 49%) to have achieved their main reason for undertaking their study. By comparison, diploma graduates and all graduates achieved similar outcomes on this measure (62% and 63% respectively). Diploma module completers were, however, much more likely than graduates (32% versus 17%) to judge that they had partly achieved their main aim, or that they were not yet able to say (18% versus 13%).

Diploma graduates

There were 20 781 graduates (weighted data) surveyed in the 1999 SOS who had completed a diploma, advanced diploma or associate diploma. Overwhelmingly, their reasons for undertaking their course were vocational, with over 80% of graduates indicating that their main reason for study was vocational. Female graduates were slightly less likely than males to indicate non-vocational reasons as their main motivation for study (17.4% versus 19.6%).

More than 62% of diploma graduates indicated that their course had helped them to achieve their main goal, while a further 16.7% indicated that the course had partly helped to achieve their main reason for study. Slightly more females than males indicated that the course helped them to achieve their main reason for study (64.3% versus 60.1%).

Of the 20 781 diploma graduates surveyed 16 210 were employed—more than 78% of the total. Of these, at least 45% were employed on a full-time basis, 21% part time and a further

13% did not provide details of their hours. Some of this last group would have been in casual employment.

Table 3: Diploma graduates—employment outcomes summary (%)

LFS after course	Male %	Female %	Persons %
Employed full time	51.8	39.7	45.2
Employed part time	13.7	26.1	20.5
Total employed	77.8	78.8	78.3
Unemployed—looking for F/T work	9.2	7.1	8.0
Unemployed—looking for P/T work	2.7	3.9	3.4
Not in the labour force	10.3	10.2	10.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Not stated/refused	0.6	0.3	0.4

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

In percentage terms, there was a higher proportion of females unemployed seeking part-time work (3.9% versus 2.7% of total females and males respectively) and a higher proportion of males than females seeking full-time work (9.2% versus 7.1%). Proportions for males and females not in the labour force were similar—around 10%. Generally these outcomes are similar to all graduates in the survey, although diploma graduates appear less likely to be not in the labour force (10% versus 13.5%).

Diploma graduates appeared more likely than all TAFE graduates to find employment in the Property and business services industry division. Health and community services, Retailing and Manufacturing were the other main industry sectors of employment for diploma graduates. Table 4 shows both the industry of employment of graduates when surveyed and the proportion either unemployed or not in the labour force. It is apparent that there are marked gender differences in some industries, notably Health and Community Services, Manufacturing and Construction.

Table 4: Diploma graduates—industry of employment by sex as at 28 May 1999 (%)

Industry after course	Males %	Females %
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0.9	0.4
Mining	1.2	0.2
Manufacturing	10.9	4.0
Electricity, gas and water supply	1.3	0.4
Construction	5.4	1.1
Wholesale trade	2.4	1.7
Retail trade	7.9	8.5
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	4.6	6.7
Transport and storage	2.5	1.8
Communication services	1.9	0.7
Finance and insurance	2.9	3.1
Property and business services	12.9	9.7
Government administration and defence	4.7	2.0
Education	3.1	5.3
Health and community services	3.6	22.0
Cultural and recreational services	1.9	2.7
Personal and other services	2.5	2.4
Not stated/refused	29.3	27.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Module completers

Female module completers outnumbered males 11 136 to 7729 in this population estimate (five records showed no data for sex). Over 70% of the module completers gave vocational reasons as their main reason for undertaking their study, compared with over 80% for graduates.

Only 29% of module completers said that the course had helped them to achieve their main reason for undertaking the course. This contrasted with a much higher figure (62%) for graduates. An additional 32% of module completers (compared with 17% of graduates) indicated that the course had partly assisted in achieving their main reason for doing the course. These results for achievement of aims indicate one significant difference between graduates and module completers. Male module completers achieved their aims more often than female module completers (36% versus 25%).

In a separate part of the questionnaire, module completers were asked to identify the main reason for not continuing their study. Of those providing a main reason, 30% gave personal reasons, 38% gave training-related reasons, 19% gave employment-related reasons and 13% gave 'any other reason' as their response.

Within the main 'training reasons' category, the main reason given was 'training timetable not flexible enough', accounting for 30% of the responses in the 'training reasons' category. Within the 'employment reasons' category, the main reason was 'other employment reasons', while within the 'personal reasons' group the main responses were 'other personal reasons' (25% of that category), 'family reasons' (24%) and 'time pressures' (23%). Generally, there does not appear to be a clustering of responses under headings that would imply that strong dissatisfaction with VET delivery was the main reason for not completing courses.

Nevertheless the two categories that would imply some dissatisfaction with training delivery ('training was not what I expected' and 'timetable not flexible enough') accounted for more than 15% of the total main reasons for not continuing. In addition, only just over 5% of the respondents said that their *main* reason for discontinuing was because they had gained what they wanted from the training. This response seems quite at odds with the responses to the question reported on earlier, where 30% of module completers said the course had helped them to achieve their main reason for doing the course. Perhaps respondents interpreted 'helped' as meaning contributing to some degree to achieving their aim. A more detailed analysis of reasons for study, achievement of those aims and reasons for discontinuing is provided later in this report.

The majority of both male and female module completers indicated that they intended to complete the course they had left. There was, however, a marked gender difference, with 66% of males indicating this intention compared to just 54% of females.

About 77% of the module completers were employed—again a figure very similar to that for graduates. About 48% were employed full time (compared with about 45% of graduates), 16% part time (cf 20% of graduates) and about 13% (13% also of graduates) did not give details of hours worked. These results show very little difference in employment outcomes between module completers and graduates, with module completers slightly more likely to be working full time and graduates more likely to be working part time.

Data on industry of employment again shows marked similarities between graduates and module completers. While there is quite a high correlation between industry of employment for graduates and module completers (correlation = 0.89), there are some differences in industry of employment between the two groups. Table 5 shows industry of employment for graduates and module completers. The 'not stated/refused' category includes those unemployed and not in the labour force.

Table 5: Industry of employment, graduates and module completers (%)

Industry after course	Graduates %	Module completers %
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0.6	0.8
Mining	0.7	1.0
Manufacturing	7.1	9.4
Electricity, gas and water supply	0.8	0.2
Construction	3.0	3.0
Wholesale trade	2.0	6.1
Retail trade	8.2	8.1
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	5.7	3.9
Transport and storage	2.1	1.7
Communication services	1.2	1.7
Finance and insurance	3.0	3.7
Property and business services	11.2	10.9
Government administration and defence	3.2	2.6
Education	4.3	8.8
Health and community services	13.7	3.2
Cultural and recreational services	2.3	1.1
Personal and other services	2.4	3.4
Not stated/refused	28.3	30.5
Total number	**20 781**	**18 870**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Far fewer module completers were estimated to be working in Health and community services than were graduates. However, the small sample sizes in each industry division for module completers means that statistically significant comparisons cannot be made on this criterion.

For module completers Health and community services ranked only eighth for employment, whereas it ranked first for graduates. This difference is reflected in the following section, which shows fewer module completers in the Health and community services field of study than graduates. Module completers, on the other hand, appeared to be more likely to be employed in the education industry than were graduates. While the sample sizes limit any conclusions from these data, this finding might indicate either that possession of formal qualifications is more critical in the Health and community services industry or that diploma courses in that area are, for some reason, easier to complete than other diploma courses. (This is not to imply a lower standard of assessment might apply. On the contrary, it could imply a higher standard of teaching and assessment achieving greater acceptance from students.) Other explanations could also, of course, exist, including sampling error.

The analysis of data suggests that module completers from diploma courses are different from module completers in other, lower level courses in some respects, especially field of study and in achievement of main aims. They are, however, quite similar to diploma graduates, although they are more likely to be a little older and to be studying for reasons related to their current employment. Graduates, on the other hand, are more likely to be either wanting to get a job or to change their job.

There seems to be scope, therefore, to explore further the issue of whether some diploma courses could be presented in different modes, perhaps more explicitly designed for those currently in the workforce. There is also scope to investigate why only 29% of module completers, compared to 62% of diploma graduates, are achieving their main aim in undertaking study and how these aims could be better addressed. One conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that it cannot be assumed that module completers who confirm that their study helped them to achieve or partly achieve their aims are necessarily 'satisfied' with the training provided. If this were the case, it would be expected that more than 5%

would have given the reason for not continuing as being that they had gained what they wanted from their training.

There are also some marked gender differences that warrant further investigation. (The NCVER study of Western Australian module completers [NCVER 1999c] also found gender differences among all module completers.) For example, 21.6% of male module completers but only 3% of females who stated that they were not intending to complete the course when they enrolled gave the reason that they had already obtained what they wanted from the training as the reason for not continuing. This seems to suggest that female students' needs are being less well addressed than males', although, again, the small sample size for females limits any firm conclusions.

Field of study

Choices of field of study by diploma graduates and module completers are similar, as shown in table 6, but do not reflect the pattern of overall student enrolment (see figure 2). Diploma graduates and module completers are much more likely to have studied in the Business administration/economics and Health and community services fields than overall student enrolments. The main differences between diploma graduates and module completers occur in Health and community services and the VET Multifield area (although the sample sizes in the latter field, especially for graduates, preclude any assumptions about statistical significance).

Table 6: Field of study, diploma graduates and module completers, number and %

Field of study	Graduates		Module completers	
	No.	%	No.	%
Land and Marine Resources, Animal Husbandry	248	1.2	194	1.0
Architecture, Building	1 036	5.0	473	2.5
Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	2 197	10.6	2 673	14.2
Business, Administration, Economics	7 039	33.9	6 909	36.6
Engineering, Surveying	2 580	12.4	2 110	11.2
Health, Community Services	3 961	19.1	1 566	8.3
Law, Legal Studies	337	1.6	229	1.2
Science	1 466	7.1	1 728	9.2
Veterinary science	62	0.3	0	0.0
Services, Hospitality, Transportation	1 804	8.7	1 206	6.4
VET Multifield Education	48	0.2	1 783	9.4
NA	2	0.0	0	0.0
Total	**20 781**	**100.0**	**18 870**	**100.0**

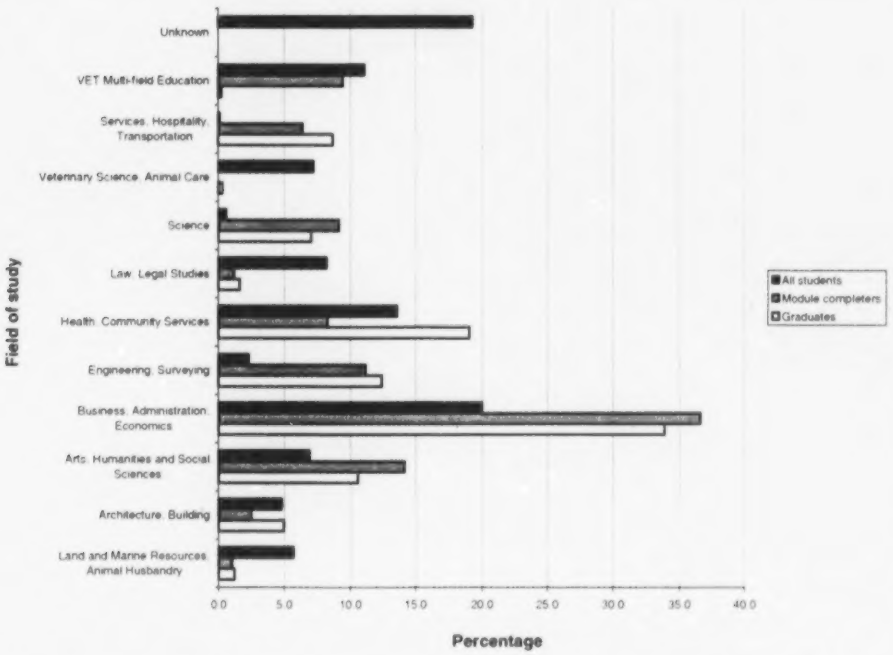
Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Figure 2 compares the field of study of diploma graduates and module completers surveyed in 1999 with overall student enrolments in 1998. There is a quite strong correlation between the fields of study of module completers and graduates (Pearson = 0.89). However, correlations between all students' and module completers' and all students' and graduates' fields of study are below 0.4, indicating that diploma graduates and module completers are more similar to each other in terms of field of study than they are to the whole body of students in VET.

As is apparent in figure 2, module completers are more likely to have studied in the arts/humanities, science and in the VET multifield fields of study than graduates. Otherwise their choices of field of study are quite similar. Module completers were less likely to have studied in the Health and community services and in the services, hospitality and transport fields of study. The differences between module completers and graduates in the Health and

community services field echoes the same pattern in terms of industry of employment for those two groups discussed elsewhere in the report.

Figure 2: Field of study, diploma graduates, module completers and total enrolments (%)



Source: Enrolment data for 'all students' is for 1998 while graduate and module completer data is from the 1999 SOS unpublished data and NCVER 1999d

Reasons for undertaking study

As noted above, both graduates and module completers had predominantly undertaken their study for vocational reasons. Some subtle differences, however, appear to exist between the two groups, while there are also gender differences in study motivations.

Male module completers were less likely than their female counterparts (about 27% versus 35%) to have begun their studies in order to get a job or to change their current job (T-test 5%). Male module completers, unlike male graduates, were less likely than females to have done their studies for reasons related to their current job ('Requirement of job' or 'To gain extra skills for current job', 18% versus 25%). Male module completers, as with male graduates, were, however, much more likely than female module completers to have undertaken their course in order to gain a promotion or a better job (24% versus 16%).

Table 7 summarises the main reasons for study for male and female graduates and module completers.

Graduates were significantly (T-test 5%) more likely to be job seekers than module completers, aiming either to find a job or to change their job, with about 48% of graduates and only 32% of module completers giving these reasons. There was a gender difference apparent for both groups—about 45% of male graduates and about 50% of female graduates giving these responses compared to just over 27% of male module completers and about 35% of female module completers. As might be expected, module completers were more likely than graduates to report personal or other reasons as their primary motivation.

The other important difference between the two groups, and to some extent the converse of graduates' job-seeking behaviour, appears to be related to motivations concerning their

current employment. Module completers were much more likely than graduates (19% versus 10%, T-test 5%) to have undertaken their study for reasons related to their current employment ('to get extra skills for current job'). About 14.5% of male module completers and 22.4% of female module completers gave this reason as their main motivation. Fewer than 12% of male graduates and 10% of female graduates, however, gave this reason as their main reason for study.

Table 7: Main reasons for study, graduates and module completers (%)

Main reason	Graduates			Module completers		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
	%	%	%	%	%	%
To get a job (or own business)	31.0	34.6	33.0	20.1	20.9	20.5
To try for a different career	13.7	15.3	14.5	7.2	14.0	11.2
To get a better job or promotion	22.2	17.9	19.9	24.2	15.7	19.2
It was a requirement of my job	3.9	2.9	3.3	3.0	2.3	2.6
I wanted extra skills for my job	11.4	9.5	10.3	14.5	22.4	19.2
To get into another course of study	7.3	6.6	6.9	8.5	1.9	4.6
For interest or personal reasons	7.8	10.7	9.4	14.7	16.8	16.0
Other reasons	2.1	2.2	2.1	7.8	4.8	6.0
Not stated/refused	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.0	1.2	0.7
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

It appears then that there could be two characteristics that might differentiate graduates and module completers:

- graduates are more likely to be aiming to find a job or a different job
- module completers are more likely either to be upgrading their skills for their current job or to have studied for reasons that are not immediately vocational

These findings appear to support the hypothesis that, to some extent, module completers are selecting modules that are related to their current employment needs and are not necessarily seeking to gain a full qualification. The focus group discussions did not strongly support this proposition, however, with most participants believing that completion of a qualification was desirable. Nevertheless some focus group participants were clear that their objective was simply to acquire specific skills absent from their portfolio, rather than to complete the whole qualification.

Did graduates and module completers achieve their main aims?

Overall, more than 62% of graduates said that their course had helped them to achieve their main aim. An additional 17% of graduates said that the course had partly helped them to achieve their main goal.

Female graduates recorded slightly higher levels of achievement of their main aim than males (64% versus 60%). Even for that group of graduates that said their main aim was to get a job, more than 53% said the course had helped them achieve their aim. Highest levels of attainment were achieved for those whose motivations were 'It was a requirement of my job' (84%), 'To get into another course of study' (82%) and 'I wanted extra skills for my job' (80%).

Table 8: Did your training help you to achieve your main reason for doing the training? (%)

Achieved main reason	Graduates			Module completers			
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Gender not stated	Persons
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	60.2	64.2	62.4	36.0	24.7	0.0	29.3
No	7.3	6.9	7.1	15.6	22.2	0.0	19.5
Partly	16.7	16.8	16.8	31.9	32.5	100.0	32.3
Don't know yet	14.9	11.4	13.0	16.6	19.2	0.0	18.1
Not stated/refused	0.9	0.6	0.8	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.8
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

By contrast, fewer than 30% of module completers said that their course had helped them to achieve their main aim. This difference between the two groups was found to be statistically significant even using a T-test at the 1% level, indicating that this is a strong distinction between graduates and module completers.

Male module completers recorded noticeably higher levels of attainment than females (36% versus 25%). Only 21% of module completers who sought to get a job or their own business were wholly successful, although a further 27% said they had 'partly' achieved this aim.

Module completers who undertook their course to gain entry into another course of study were much more likely than all module completers to achieve their objective, with 67% saying they achieved their aim (see table 9). Module completers whose main aim was either 'to get extra skills for their current job' or because the study 'was a requirement of their current job' were much more likely to have achieved their main aim in studying. 43% and 48% of module completers in these groups respectively stated they had achieved their main aim.

Module completers in the Health and community services field of study were least likely to have achieved their aim; however, these aims were mainly either to get into another course or personal reasons.

Those module completers who sought to change their career were markedly less successful than their graduate counterparts. Fewer than 12% of module completers who wanted to change careers said their study had helped achieve this aim compared with 58% of graduates.

These results for module completers in diploma courses were poorer than for all module completers surveyed in the 1999 SOS. Almost 49% of module completers in all courses reported that their course had helped them to achieve their main aim. A further 21% reported that the course had partially assisted in this aim.

By contrast, the satisfaction results for all graduates in the 1999 SOS were similar to those recorded for diploma graduates. 63.4% of all graduates reported the course helped them to achieve their objective, and a further 16% reported that the course partially assisted.

More than 76% of graduates in the Health and community services field of study stated that their training had helped them to achieve their main aim. There were particularly high satisfaction scores for those who wanted either to get extra skills for their job or for whom the course was a requirement of their job.

Table 9: Main reason for doing course by whether achieved that objective, number and percentage

Main reason for doing the course	Did your course help you to achieve your main reason for doing the course?						
	Yes	No	Partly	Don't know yet	Not stated/ refused	**Group total**	Column %
Diploma graduates							
To get a job (or own business)	3 651	695	1286	1201	15	**6 849**	33.0
Line % of above reason	*53.3*	*10.1*	*18.8*	*17.5*	*0.2*	***100.0***	
To try for a different career	1 763	258	513	487	3	**3 023**	14.5
Line % of above reason	*58.3*	*8.5*	*17.0*	*16.1*	*0.1*	***100.0***	
To get a better job or promotion	2 331	349	766	662	22	**4 130**	19.9
Line % of above reason	*56.4*	*8.4*	*18.6*	*16.0*	*0.5*	***100.0***	
It was a requirement of my job	578	17	61	30	0	**687**	3.3
Line % of above reason	*84.2*	*2.5*	*8.9*	*4.4*	*0.0*	***100.0***	
I wanted extra skills for my job	1 733	35	325	51	6	**2 150**	10.3
Line % of above reason	*80.6*	*1.6*	*15.1*	*2.4*	*0.3*	***100.0***	
To get into another course of study	1 183	40	133	78	4	**1 437**	6.9
Line % of above reason	*82.3*	*2.8*	*9.2*	*5.4*	*0.3*	***100.0***	
For interest or personal reasons	1 456	40	318	126	4	**1 945**	9.4
Line % of above reason	*74.9*	*2.1*	*16.4*	*6.5*	*0.2*	***100.0***	
Other reasons	262	29	87	65	2	**445**	2.1
Line % of above reason	*59.0*	*6.5*	*19.4*	*14.6*	*0.5*	***100.0***	
Not stated/refused	8	2	0	0	103	**114**	0.5
Line % of above reason	*7.5*	*1.4*	*0.0*	*0.0*	*91.1*	***100.0***	
Total	**12 966**	**1 466**	**3 489**	**2 700**	**160**	**20 781**	**100.0**
Line % of total	*62.4*	*7.1*	*16.8*	*13.0*	*0.8*	***100.0***	
Module completers							
To get a job (or own business)	798	1168	1057	853	0	**3 876**	20.5
Line % of above reason	*20.6*	*30.1*	*27.3*	*22.0*	*0.0*	***100.0***	
To try for a different career	292	762	520	535	6	**2 115**	11.2
Line % of above reason	*13.8*	*36.0*	*24.6*	*25.3*	*0.3*	***100.0***	
To get a better job or promotion	980	926	853	860	0	**3 620**	19.2
Line % of above reason	*27.1*	*25.6*	*23.6*	*23.8*	*0.0*	***100.0***	
It was a requirement of my job	214	51	220	0	0	**485**	2.6
Line % of above reason	*44.2*	*10.5*	*45.3*	*0.0*	*0.0*	***100.0***	
I wanted extra skills for my job	1 734	367	1 010	497	7	**3 614**	19.2
Line % of above reason	*48.0*	*10.2*	*27.9*	*13.7*	*0.2*	***100.0***	
To get into another course of study	583	56	101	127	0	**868**	4.6
Line % of above reason	*67.2*	*6.5*	*11.7*	*14.7*	*0.0*	***100.0***	
For interest or personal reasons	853	200	1 721	242	0	**3 015**	16.0
Line % of above reason	*28.3*	*6.6*	*57.1*	*8.0*	*0.0*	***100.0***	
Other reasons	76	149	608	305	0	**1 139**	6.0
Line % of above reason	*6.7*	*13.1*	*53.4*	*26.8*	*0.0*	***100.0***	
Not stated/refused	0	0	0	0	137	**137**	0.7
Line % of above reason	*0.0*	*0.0*	*0.0*	*0.0*	*100.0*	***100.0***	
Total	**5 531**	**3 680**	**6 090**	**3 419**	**150**	**18 870**	**100.0**
Line % of total	*29.3*	*19.5*	*32.3*	*18.1*	*0.8*	***100.0***	

28

Why did module completers not continue?

As noted earlier, there is an apparent contradiction between reasons given by module completers for not continuing study and their answers to questions on whether their study helped them to achieve their main objective. Table 10 shows the reasons given by module completers for not continuing study by whether the training helped them achieve their main reason for undertaking the study.

Table 10: Reasons for discontinuing by whether training helped achieve main aim, module completers (%)

Main reason for discontinuing	Did your training help you to achieve your main reason for doing the training?					
	Yes	No	Partly	Don't know yet	No response	**Total**
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Changed jobs/new job	1.9	1.7	2.2	0.8	0.0	**6.5**
I lost my job	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**0.0**
Got the skills needed for my job	1.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	**2.2**
Other employment reasons	2.8	0.5	3.6	2.2	0.0	**9.2**
Gained what I wanted from the training	3.3	0.0	0.7	1.1	0.0	**5.1**
Started other training	2.2	0.1	1.5	1.2	0.0	**4.9**
The training no longer related to plans	1.4	1.3	1.9	0.8	0.0	**5.5**
Training not what expected	0.3	3.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	**3.5**
Training timetable too inflexible	2.6	0.7	4.8	2.7	0.0	**10.7**
Other training reasons	1.5	2.0	2.1	0.0	0.0	**5.6**
moved from area	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	**1.3**
Illness	0.7	0.4	1.9	1.7	0.0	**4.7**
Family reasons	0.5	1.0	3.1	2.1	0.0	**6.6**
Financial reasons	0.0	0.1	1.5	0.3	0.0	**1.8**
Too many time pressures	1.6	2.3	1.2	0.6	0.7	**6.4**
Other personal reasons	2.3	1.1	1.2	2.4	0.0	**6.9**
Other reasons	3.1	4.1	3.5	1.4	0.0	**12.3**
Not stated	3.6	0.8	1.5	0.8	0.0	**6.8**
Total	**29.3**	**19.5**	**32.3**	**18.1**	**0.8**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Responses recorded to the question 'What was the main reason you chose not to continue/undertake more TAFE training in 1999?' were distributed across a wide range. Equal numbers identified training (31%) and personal reasons (31%), while 19% gave employment reasons, 12% gave other reasons and the remainder provided no main reason. As noted earlier, many of the responses within these broad categories were non-specific. Some rewording of the SOS questionnaire, taking into account some of the 'other' reasons given, might assist future surveys to provide better information. For example, Burke's (1998) suggestion noted earlier in this report that some VET students might undertake VET to gain low-cost credits for university courses might be worth testing explicitly.

One conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that it cannot be assumed that module completers who confirm that their study helped them to achieve or partly achieve their aims are necessarily 'satisfied' with the training provided. If this were the case, it would be expected that more than 5.1% would have given the reason for not continuing as being that they had gained what they wanted from their training. Further, a mere 2.2% responded that they had 'got the skills they needed for their job'.

Reason for discontinuing appeared to vary by age group, with younger persons more likely to discontinue for employment-related reasons. Older module completers are more likely to cite training reasons, while those aged over 30 are much more likely to cite personal reasons. Table 11 summarises these findings. Sample sizes in most cells in the table, however, are too small to draw firm conclusions about age differences.

Table 11: Module completers—summary reasons for not continuing by age group (%)

Main reason for not continuing	Age at 28 May 1999 (yrs)										
	15–19 years	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–34 years	35–39 years	40–44 years	45–49 years	50–54 years	55 and over	Not stated/ refused	**Total**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Employment reasons	7.7	37.9	20.6	8.8	8.8	8.9	4.9	1.0	1.1	0.2	**100.0**
Training reasons	12.2	23.3	25.8	12.0	11.1	9.2	2.7	3.5	0.2	0.0	**100.0**
Personal reasons	6.4	15.9	16.6	23.7	10.8	7.5	8.6	2.1	6.6	1.7	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Do module completers intend to complete the course?

(Tables 12 and 13 in the following section are derived from detailed data shown in the appendix at table 21.)

Overall 53.2% of module completers said that they intended to complete the course of study they had been enrolled in, as shown in table 12.

Table 12: Module completers—intention to complete their training course, persons (%)

Do you intend to complete that training?			
Yes %	No %	Not stated/ refused %	**Total %**
53.2	37.5	9.2	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Males were much more likely (T-test 5%) than females to state that they intended to complete the course, with 62% of males giving this response against only 47% of female module completers. About 37% of males who said they intended to complete the course had discontinued for personal reasons, especially illness. About one-third (33.5%) of females intending to complete the course gave personal reasons for discontinuing; however, an additional 12.3% said they had discontinued because the training timetable was too inflexible. Only 1.9% of females intending to complete gave illness as the reason for discontinuing. This difference in responses concerning the influence of illness on decisions to continue is disconcerting. About 5% of females overall (both those intending to complete and not intending to complete) gave illness as the reason for not continuing, while about 14% of males gave this reason. Whether this is a genuine difference, a statistical artefact or whether there is a gender issue in providing a 'plausible' excuse for what in fact was perceived as a personal failure is not clear.

The researchers have not sought to establish whether this difference in morbidity is reflected in overall population data. A research question that this issue might also raise is whether males undertaking VET courses suffer on-the-job injuries which contribute to non-completion of courses.

For the large minority (37.5%) who said they did not intend to complete the course, most gave training-related reasons for discontinuing. There was, however, again a marked difference on a gender basis, with 21.5% of males but only 3.3% of females who were not intending to

complete the course giving the reason that they had already obtained what they wanted from the training.

This might seem to lead to the conclusion that males were generally having their training needs better addressed than females. However, males not intending to complete the course were also more likely to be critical of the training, with over 15% in this category saying the training was 'not what I expected'. Only 4.3% of females not intending to complete gave this response. Females most commonly gave personal reasons or a change of jobs as their reason for not intending to complete the course. For females, the largest single reason for discontinuing for those not intending to complete was 'family reasons' (10.2%).

Overall, it seems that there are some gender differences that warrant further investigation among module completers at the diploma level. Males appear more likely to be module completers who have obtained satisfactory outcomes, whether or not they intended to complete the course. Adding together responses to the two questions indicating a satisfactory learning outcome from the student's perspective ('I got the skills I needed for my job' and 'I gained what I wanted from the training'—see table 21) about 11.3% of all male module completers achieved positive outcomes. Only about 4.4% of female module completers, however, achieved such outcomes.

Table 13 provides summary data for module completers by reason for not completing their course by whether they intend to complete the course. Numerical data from which these percentages are derived are provided in appendix 3, table 21.

Table 13: Module completers—reasons for not continuing by whether intending to complete course (%)

Reasons for not continuing	Do you intend to complete that training?			
	Males		Females	
	Yes %	*No %*	*Yes %*	*No %*
Changed jobs or started a new job	10.8	3.9	3.1	9.6
I lost my job	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
I got the skills I needed for my job	5.0	0.0	0.1	3.6
Other employment reasons	9.3	3.1	11.6	4.8
I gained what I wanted from the training I had completed	1.8	21.5	3.1	3.3
I transferred to, or started, other training	2.6	9.4	6.1	5.3
The training no longer relates to my plans	0.2	21.6	2.4	7.1
The training was not what I expected	0.0	12.9	3.0	4.3
Training timetable not flexible enough me to attend class	12.2	0.3	12.3	9.8
Other training reasons (e.g. changes to training structure)	3.2	6.6	6.4	4.3
I moved from the area	2.7	1.9	1.1	0.1
Illness prevented me from continuing	12.3	1.9	1.9	3.2
Family reasons prevented me from continuing	4.8	0.0	9.5	10.2
Financial reasons prevented me from continuing	5.4	0.0	0.3	0.1
There were too many pressures on my time	3.6	0.8	11.5	8.1
Other personal reasons	8.3	0.5	9.2	6.7
Any other reason	11.4	15.5	11.3	16.7
Not stated	6.4	0.0	7.1	3.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Students' rating of course quality

Graduates and module completers were asked to rate on a five-point scale a range of aspects of their course. The results from the two groups were quite similar. Graduates, being more likely to be seeking employment, placed somewhat more importance on the value of the course for increasing their job prospects and on whether the course reflected industry

practice. Module completers accorded relatively (T-test significance 5%) higher priority to the instructor's knowledge of the subject content and the instructor's ability to relate to students.

Table 14 shows the percentages of both graduates and module completers rating each of the following areas as the most important area of service delivery.

Table 14: Most important area of service delivery, graduates and module completers (%)

Area	Graduates %	Module completers %
Instructors' knowledge of subject content	26.7	31.7
Instructors' ability to relate to students	9.1	12.7
Balance between instruction and practice	4.3	3.4
Making methods of assessment clear	1.5	3.3
Subject content reflecting industry practice	14.5	8.0
Presentation of training material	0.5	1.0
Quality of equipment to practice skills	1.6	2.2
Enough equipment to practice skills	0.9	2.2
Access to library and learning resources	0.7	0.3
Convenience of venue and class times	1.6	2.5
Information received when choosing training	0.6	1.3
Admin: enquiries, enrolment, fees paid, results	0.3	1.1
Information about careers/jobs	1.4	1.2
Student counselling services	0.1	0.0
Usefulness of the training for job prospects	15.5	9.4
Quals well regarded by employers	7.9	3.6
Training value for money	1.2	1.8
Overall quality of training	6.8	8.8
Not stated/refused	4.7	5.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

The importance that module completers placed on the ability of instructors to relate to students is more difficult to interpret. It might indicate that module completers found shortcomings in this area and this factor might have contributed to their becoming module completers rather than graduates. This possibility did emerge from the focus groups where several of the module completers described, sometimes bitterly, poor relationships with certain teachers that influenced their decision to leave the course. Poor relationships with teachers, however, could not be said to have been a major influence for leaving their course among the majority of module completers participating in the focus groups. Pressure of work, personal and family reasons and perhaps the difficulty of some diploma courses appeared more significant factors in non-completion in the three groups interviewed.

Several of the graduates in these groups also complained of poor teaching standards, although the majority of both graduates and module completers in all groups expressed satisfaction with teaching standards.

Employment outcomes

More than three-quarters of both module completers (77.5%) and graduates (78.0%) in diploma courses were employed. This section examines employment outcomes for graduates and module completers by field of study, occupation and industry of employment.

Employment outcomes by field of study

Table 15 summarises the labour market outcomes for diploma graduates and module completers.

Table 15: Summary labour market outcomes, graduates and module completers (%)

	Emp. full time	Emp. part time	Unemp. full time	Unemp. part time	Not in the labour force	No response	Emp. other	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Graduates	45.0	20.4	8.0	3.4	10.2	0.4	12.6	**100.0**
Module completers	48.1	16.0	5.9	1.3	14.6	0.7	13.3	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Graduates

About 45% of graduates were employed full time and a further 20.4% were employed part time. A further 12.6% were employed but provided no details of their employment hours. It is likely that some of this group could be employed in casual work of variable hours. Overall, 8% of graduates were unemployed seeking full-time employment and 3.3% were unemployed seeking part-time employment. Employment prospects varied markedly according to the field of study, as shown in table 16.

Table 16: Employment outcomes, diploma graduates by field of study (%)

Field of study	Emp. full time	Emp. part time	Unemp. Seeking full time	Unemp. Seeking part time	Not in the labour force	No response	Emp. other	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Land/marine	49.6	16.4	5.8	2.1	7.9	0.7	17.6	**100.0**
Arch/bldg	57.8	11.0	7.9	1.5	9.2	0.4	12.1	**100.0**
Arts/hum	27.1	28.8	11.3	5.4	15.6	0.6	11.1	**100.0**
Bus/admin	49.3	16.1	7.3	3.6	11.0	0.4	12.2	**100.0**
Eng/surv	59.8	8.7	8.5	2.5	8.9	0.5	11.1	**100.0**
Health/cs	38.7	31.0	5.3	2.8	7.9	0.3	13.9	**100.0**
Law	51.3	18.1	9.8	4.8	8.1	0.0	7.9	**100.0**
Science	43.7	14.8	14.9	3.6	13.7	0.4	9.0	**100.0**
Vet science	48.4	24.2	9.5	5.9	2.8	0.0	9.1	**100.0**
Services	33.9	31.4	6.2	2.8	6.3	0.6	18.9	**100.0**
Multifield	62.0	11.5	8.0	3.8	4.5	0.0	10.1	**100.0**
NA	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**100.0**
Total	**45.0**	**20.4**	**8.0**	**3.4**	**10.2**	**0.4**	**12.6**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Diploma graduates in the fields of Land and marine resources/animal husbandry, Health and community services, Veterinary science/animal care and in Services/hospitality/transportation were most likely to be employed. The fields of study producing the lowest employment outcomes for diploma graduates was Arts/humanities/social sciences.

Full-time employment outcomes were highest for graduates in Engineering/surveying and in Architecture/building, with 60% and 58% respectively in full-time jobs. Both these fields were strongly male-dominated. By comparison, the female-dominated fields of

Arts/humanities and Health and community services recorded much lower full-time employment outcomes (26% and 38% respectively). Part-time employment in these fields was, however, higher at 29% and 31% respectively.

Module completers

Table 17 shows the employment outcomes by field of study for module completers. It is apparent that overall employment outcomes for module completers are very similar to those for graduates, although small sample sizes in some cells limit the conclusions that can be drawn from these data.

Module completers are slightly more likely to be employed full time than graduates and less likely to be employed part time. Perhaps reflecting their greater likelihood of studying for non-vocational reasons, module completers were also more likely not to be in the labour force. Only the differences in part-time employment and the proportions not in the labour force were found to be significant in a T-test at the 5% level.

Table 17: Employment outcomes, module completers, by field of study (%)

Field of study	Emp. full time	Emp. part time	Unemp. Seeking full time	Unemp. Seeking part time	Not in the labour force	No response	Emp. other	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Land/Marine	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**100.0**
Arch/Bldg	60.6	1.5	23.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.5	**100.0**
Arts/Hum	37.7	19.6	5.5	1.2	23.0	0.0	12.9	**100.0**
Bus/admin	57.5	12.8	3.9	1.2	8.3	2.0	14.3	**100.0**
Eng/surv	50.6	22.8	1.9	0.0	12.3	0.0	12.5	**100.0**
Health/com serv	37.3	26.7	12.1	0.3	6.2	0.0	17.4	**100.0**
Law	64.4	35.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**100.0**
Science	64.8	7.0	5.7	3.5	4.2	0.0	14.8	**100.0**
Serv/hosp/trans	35.9	22.9	8.4	0.7	20.7	0.0	11.4	**100.0**
Multifield	15.1	12.6	8.9	2.8	50.0	0.0	10.6	**100.0**
Total	**48.1**	**16.0**	**5.9**	**1.3**	**14.6**	**0.7**	**13.3**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Most of the cells in table 17 contain too few cases to allow statistically reliable conclusions.

Nevertheless the numerically most popular field of study, Business administration/economics, produced better employment outcomes than in most other fields, with about 57.5% of module completers in this field employed full time, a further 12.8% part-time work and 14.3% in other modes of employment. In the second most numerous field, Arts/humanities, only about 38% of module completers found full-time employment, although another 32.5% found other modes of employment. Outcomes for those in the Health and community services field were similar to Arts/humanities, with 37% employed full time and about 44% in other employment.

To some extent, these employment outcomes appear to be gender-related, with males predominating in the Science and Engineering fields of study and females in the Arts/humanities and Health and community services fields. Female TAFE graduates in general are much more likely than male graduates to be employed part time (Dumbrell et al. 2000).

The outcomes in the Business administration/economics field cannot simply be explained, however, by gender differences. Female module completers outnumbered males by more than 2:1 in this field of study. The study by the authors referenced in the previous paragraph did find, however, that there appeared to be occupational segregation in at least one of the major destination industries, Finance and insurance, for graduates in the Business

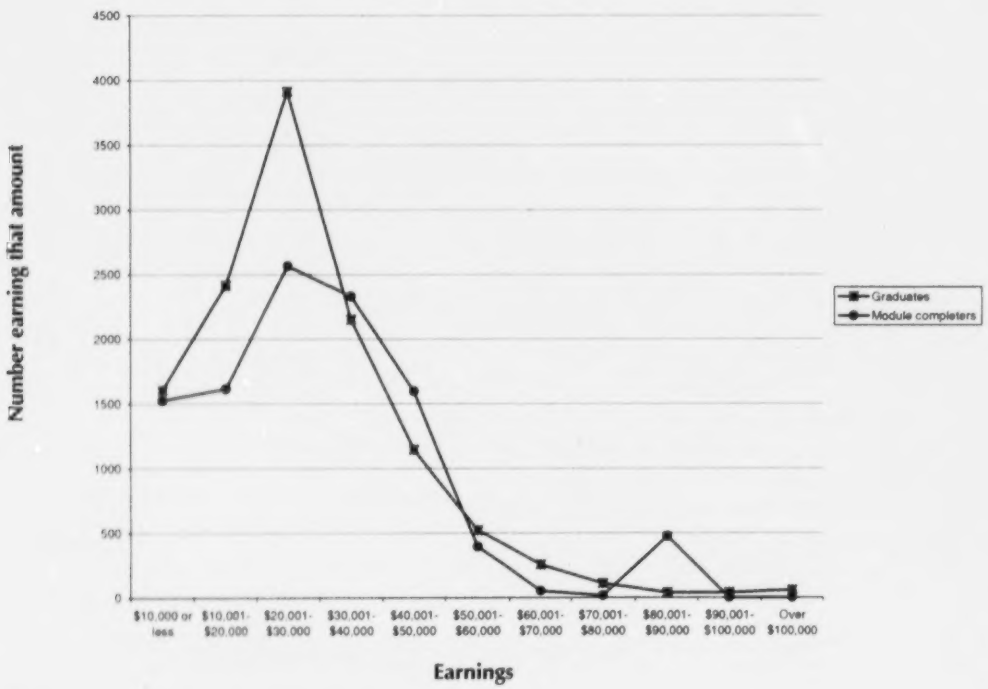
administration field that saw females entering lower level occupations than males. This finding is reinforced by these data for module completers. About 45% of male module completers in Business administration were working in management/administrative, professional or associate professional occupations when surveyed. By contrast, only 16% of female module completers were employed in these occupational groups. When the detailed fields of study are examined, there does not appear to be evidence of gender segregation at this level that might explain employment-based occupational segregation. Nevertheless, again the size of the sample limits any firm conclusions on these issues, although it is suggested that other research might investigate these matters.

It also appears that, especially for females, the Business/administration field of study should be analysed further to determine whether some current associate diploma and diploma courses might be restructured into shorter courses to meet the needs of those module completers currently leaving these courses into full- and part-time employment. Apparent gender discrimination in employment in the finance and insurance industry might also be a subject for further investigation.

Income

The income profiles of graduates and module completers were quite similar (correlation 0.93), although greater numbers of graduates fell into the lower income ranges.

Figure 3: Earnings profile, graduates and module completers, number earning that amount within each earnings range



Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Occupational outcomes

In terms of the major ASCO (Australian Standard Classification of Occupations) group there were few differences between graduates and module completers in the jobs in which they

were employed when surveyed. The occupational distributions as shown in table 18 showed a high correlation coefficient of 0.98.

Table 18: Occupational outcomes, graduates and module completers by major ASCO group, (%)

Occupational group after course	Module completers %	Graduates %
Managers and administrators	2.5	4.4
Professionals	13.9	15.2
Associate professionals	18.6	20.2
Tradespersons and related	8.1	6.3
Advanced clerical/sales/service	6.4	3.4
Intermediate clerical/sales/service	23.5	30.0
Intermediate production and transport workers	4.9	2.9
Elementary clerical/sales/service	13.2	8.5
Labourers and related	3.7	3.7
Total percentage employed (where occupation known)	**94.7**	**94.6**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

The only statistically significant differences occurred for Intermediate clerical/sales/service and Elementary clerical/sales/service workers.

For diploma graduates, satisfaction with outcomes appears to be related to the occupation in which these graduates were employed, although, again, the small sample size limits the degree to which any conclusions can be drawn. Graduates who expressed the highest level of satisfaction with their course were, as would be expected, those who were working in management/administrative, professional or associate professional occupations. This tendency does not appear as strong among module completers, although those employed as managers/administrators expressed the highest level of satisfaction. This pattern appears to confirm the impression that module completers are more likely to be in employment and studying to enhance their skills for their current job.

The focus group discussions illustrated this. One module completer from a trade background, for example, had undertaken modules that specifically addressed his work needs in an administrative position. He had never aimed to undertake the full diploma, and considered his endeavours successful in improving his prospects.

Occupational outcomes by gender

As is the case with graduates and module completers from all courses, graduates and module completers from diploma courses also displayed marked gender differences in their occupational outcomes. Again gender appeared to be more important in determining occupational outcome than whether the student was a graduate or module completer, as is shown in table 19.

The most marked gender differences occurred at the level of associate professionals and tradespersons, with male graduates and module completers dominant in both groups. The outcome for tradespersons, of course, results from the gender bias in traditional trade apprenticeship areas. Strikingly, more than 40% of the female graduates and almost one-third of the female module completers were employed in 'Intermediate clerical, sales and service' occupations.

More than a quarter of male graduates and 17% of the male module completers were employed at the associate professional level, whereas only 14% of female graduates and 15% of female module completers were working as associate professionals. These outcomes for graduates seem to reflect the pattern of all female VET graduates who have a narrower range of occupational outcomes than males and a lesser probability of being employed at the

associate professional level despite the possession of qualifications equivalent to male VET graduates (see Dumbrell et al. 2000).

At the professional level, outcomes were more even between males and females, although female graduates were less likely to be employed at this level than female module completers or all males. Again, the sample sizes for module completers, other than for females in the Intermediate clerical/sales/service area, Intermediate clerical/sales/service limit conclusions here.

Table 19: Occupational outcomes by gender, diploma graduates and module completers (%)

Occupational group after course	Males %		Females %	
	Graduates	MCs	Graduates	MCs
Not stated/refused/not known	5.8	3.3	5.2	6.5
Managers and administrators	5.9	11.3	3.2	1.8
Professionals	16.3	23.0	14.3	15.9
Associate professionals	27.5	17.3	14.3	15.3
Tradespersons and related	11.9	2.9	1.8	1.2
Advanced clerical/sales/service	1.5	12.7	4.9	8.9
Intermediate clerical/sales/service	14.0	9.4	43.0	31.4
Intermediate production and transport workers	5.3	9.6	0.9	1.6
Elementary clerical/sales/service	6.4	6.8	10.1	15.8
Labourers and related	5.5	3.8	2.3	1.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Employment by industry

As with occupational outcomes, the industry of employment of graduates and module completers from diploma courses, when compared at the industry division level, were very similar. Table 20 shows industry of employment when surveyed in May 1999 for both module completers and graduates.

As noted earlier, the main differences between the two groups appear to be:

- graduates are more likely to be employed in Health and community services
- module completers are more likely than graduates to be employed in education

The pattern of employment by industry for diploma graduates and module completers shown in table 20 is quite different from the industry of employment of all TAFE graduates. Compared with graduates and module completers in diploma courses, all graduates are more likely to be employed in manufacturing, retailing and construction, and less likely to be employed in property and business services. Table 23 in appendix 3 provides a gender breakdown for the data in table 20.

Gender differences by industry were also apparent. Among graduates (but not module completers), females were heavily concentrated in the Health and community services industry (mainly in the community services sub-division), probably reflecting the predominance of females in childcare and similar sectors working as carers and aides. (See the following section for more detail.) In fact, on an industry sub-division basis, one in three of employed female graduates were employed in community services. Female module completers were most likely to be found in the education sector.

Males were more diverse in their industry of employment. The greatest concentration of male graduates occurred in the business services area, accounting for about 13% of all male diploma graduates. Male module completers were most concentrated in manufacturing employment.

Table 20: Industry of employment when surveyed, by industry division (%)

Industry	Graduates %	Module completers %
Agriculture	0.6	0.8
Mining	0.7	1.0
Manufacturing	7.1	9.4
Electricity/gas/water	0.8	0.2
Construction	3.0	3.0
Wholesale	2.0	6.1
Retail	8.2	8.1
Accommodation/cafes/restaurants	5.7	3.9
Transport	2.1	1.7
Communication	1.2	1.7
Finance/insurance	3.0	3.7
Property/business services	11.2	10.9
Government/administration/defence	3.2	2.6
Education	4.3	8.8
Health/community services	13.7	3.2
Cultural/recreational services	2.3	1.1
Personal/other services	2.4	3.4
No response (incl. unemployed and not in labour force)	28.3	30.5

Source: 1999 SOS unpublished data

Conclusions

Associate diploma, diploma and advanced diploma courses (grouped together as diploma courses in this study) are the highest level courses generally offered by VET institutions across Australia. Completion rates appear to be very low (Foyster, Fai & Shah 2000). This study has attempted to identify whether module completers from diploma courses are identifiable by their course characteristics and whether their motivations to undertake study and their employment outcomes are significantly different from diploma graduates. The study also aims to determine whether there are policies that could be pursued to better align diploma courses to the needs of all students.

Failure to complete a course of study at any level of education is often viewed as either a personal shortcoming on the part of the non-completing student or a shortcoming in the delivery of the course. For example, considerable efforts have been expended recently on analysing reasons for attrition from apprenticeship courses (DETYA 2000). Within the VET sector, however, non-completion, which can sometimes merely be the result of a student taking a temporary break from a course, is very common. Some module completer participants in the focus groups said that they had not intended to complete the course but rather only sought to fill gaps in their skills portfolio.

The NCVER SOS (NCVER 1999a) found that module completers across all courses outnumbered all VET graduates by more than 2:1 (113 300 graduates identified compared to about 246 000 module completers). Foyster, Fai and Shah (2000) estimated whole course completion and partial course completion (successful module completion) rates for those who commenced a VET course in 1994 to be 27% and 49%, respectively. Both the SOS and the focus group interviews revealed that the major motive for undertaking study for both graduates and module completers was vocational. Only about 9% of graduates and 6% of module completers gave 'interest or personal reasons' as their prime motivation.

This research project has established that the employment outcomes for module completers and graduates from diploma courses are very similar. Graduates and module completers from diploma courses are more likely to be employed than are all TAFE graduates. By some measures of employment outcome, such as occupation, gender appears to be more significant than whether the individual is a graduate or module completer.

Module completers were slightly less likely to be employed part time. Perhaps reflecting their greater likelihood of studying for non-vocational reasons, module completers were also slightly more likely not to be in the labour force. There were no significant differences in full-time employment outcomes.

The main area of difference between diploma graduates and module completers appears to be in their motivations for studying and in their achievement of their objectives. Module completers are more likely to have studied for reasons related to their current employment. Graduates, however, are more likely to have studied in order either to get a job or to change their job. Module completers are also more likely than graduates to have studied for personal rather than vocational reasons.

Another major distinction to emerge from the study was that module completers were significantly less likely than graduates to have achieved their main aim in undertaking their course of study. More than 60% of graduates said that they had achieved their main aim in

studying, while less than 30% of module completers gave this response. This was despite the fact that graduates were significantly more likely than module completers to be seeking a job or to establish their own business. Graduates who were most likely to achieve their aims were those motivated by reasons related to their current job. Female graduates recorded slightly higher levels of satisfaction than males. Even for that group of graduates who said that their main aim was to get a job, more than 53% said the course had helped them achieve their aim.

Male module completers recorded noticeably higher levels of attainment of their main aim than did females. For those module completers whose main aim was either to gain entry to another course of training, to get extra skills for their current job or because the study was a requirement of their current job, the levels of attainment of these aims were much higher.

In the focus groups, some module completers were highly critical of their TAFE experience, particularly the quality of teachers and the lack of flexibility in course delivery times. Some graduates voiced the opinion that their course had been too long and had included some superfluous material.

The failure of a much higher proportion of module completers than graduates to attain their objectives is unlikely to be related to incapacity on the part of module completers. Module completers in diploma courses were more likely, for example, than graduates to hold a university degree or a trade qualification.

The finding that diploma module completers were much less likely than diploma graduates to have achieved their main reason for studying raises the question: 'Why would students doing a high level course quit the course when they have usually failed to achieve their main aim?' It suggests that many students might be inappropriately starting modules in diploma courses, when, in fact, the course is unlikely to satisfy their training needs. It might also indicate that some students enrolling in these courses either have false impressions of the course or, as some participants in the focus groups indicated, these older and more 'work savvy' students are more critical of courses or teachers that fail to meet their expectations.

There were few differences at the major occupational group level between graduates and module completers in the jobs in which they were employed when surveyed. Gender was more important in determining the occupational outcome than whether the student was a graduate or module completer. Gender differences were not marked on an industry of employment status basis.

This present study found that module completers' reasons for non-completion of diploma courses covered a wide range of responses, many of which were classified, unhelpfully as 'employment-related other' or 'training-related other'. When reasons were grouped as either 'Employment-related', 'Training-related' or 'Personal', equal numbers identified training (31%) and personal reasons (31%), while 19% gave employment reasons. A further 12% gave other reasons, and the remainder provided no main reason. Module completers who participated in the focus groups generally attributed their leaving a course to some changed circumstance in their life—either a new job or a change in their personal life.

The study found that 54% of module completers from diploma courses said that they intended to complete the course of study they had been enrolled in. Males were much more likely than females to state that they intended to complete the course, with 62% of males giving this response against only 48% of female module completers. Nearly 40% of males who said they intended to complete the course had discontinued for personal reasons, especially illness.

Less than one-third of females intending to complete the course gave personal reasons for discontinuing; however, an additional 10% said they had discontinued because the training timetable was too inflexible.

Perhaps reflecting the different motivations of graduates and module completers, the two groups differed markedly also in the aspects of their course that they rated as most important. Almost 30% of module completers gave their highest rating to the ability of their teacher/instructor to relate to the students, whereas more than 25% of graduates rated the

teacher/instructor's knowledge of the subject matter as most important. These different priorities might reflect the greater likelihood of module completers being already working and improving their skills for their current job. They presumably are in a better position than graduates to judge the instructor's knowledge of the subject. Graduates are more likely to be seeking a job or changing their job and thus less able to judge the instructor's knowledge.

The importance of instructors' ability in relating to students for module completers is of considerable interest. One impression gained from the focus groups was that some module completers might have dropped out through personal problems or through clashes with teachers. This response suggests that some module completers might be, in part, criticising the capacity of teachers to relate to their students and perhaps blaming them for their failure to complete the course.

Another observation that can be made about the findings is that the existence of such a high proportion of module completers among all VET students, including those who already possess post-school qualifications, suggests that many are using formal VET courses as an alternative to commercial short training courses. The ABS *Education and training experience, Australia* survey (ABS 1997) shows TAFE has an apparently low share of the short training course market (Dumbrell 2000); however, the ABS definition excludes those enrolled in formal education courses such as TAFE certificates and diplomas. It seems likely, therefore, that to some extent module completers in the formal VET sector are analogous to completers of short training courses that are not part of the formal VET system. This highlights the artificiality of separating 'formal' VET from commercially funded or in-house provision of short training courses. The 1999 SOS data show, in particular, that over 10% of module completers from diploma courses had a trade certificate as their highest prior educational qualification.

One theme to emerge from the focus groups that is not able to be explored using SOS data was the way in which courses were selected by students. Several had chosen VET diplomas as a fallback position after having failed to gain a university place. Some had apparently chosen their course on the basis of very imperfect information and initially knew little of the likely employment outcomes to be expected from the course. There might be value in explicitly testing both these issues in some future SOSs. It is known that participants in the SOS are critical of the provision of information on careers (NCVER 1999a).

Those focus group students who had selected a course in concert with their employer or on the basis of advice from work colleague or managers seemed to have made more informed choices. Several said that they had received direct employer support for their study, although a regular theme to emerge from the focus groups was the withdrawal of employer support for VET courses over recent years.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 1996, Census of Population and Housing, unpublished data.

ABS 1997, *Education and training experience, Australia*, cat. 6278.0, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Anderson, D 1997a, 'Clients in the training market: Facts and fiction, good thinking good practice: Research perspectives on learning and work', in *5th Annual International Conference on Post-compulsory Education and Training*, Gold Coast Queensland, 26–28 November 1997, vol.2.

—— 1997b, *Students perceptions of career development and employment services in TAFE*, ACER, Monash University.

—— 1998, 'Successful reform: Reframing the national VET policy agenda', in *Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training*, eds F Ferrier and D Anderson, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.

Burke, G 1998, 'Education and training in Australia: Reforms and results', in *Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training*, eds F Ferrier and D Anderson, NCVER, Adelaide.

DETYA (Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) 2000, *Attrition in apprenticeships—an analysis of apprentices commencing between July 1994 and June 1996*, DETYA, Canberra

Dumbrell, T 2000, *Training in Australia—An analysis of education and training experience*, Australia. Research Centre for VET, University of Technology, Sydney.

—— de Montfort, R, Finnegan, W & Wright, P 2000, *Still Not Equal: A study of differences in male and female TAFE graduates' earnings in Australia*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Dyer, P & Wyn, J 1998, 'Beyond the linear models: Pathways and outcomes of 1991 Victorian exit students', in *Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training*, eds F Ferrier and D Anderson, NCVER, Adelaide.

Ferrier, F 1998, 'Equity and user choice in VET', in *Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training*, eds F Ferrier and D Anderson, NCVER, Adelaide.

Foyster, J, Fai, HK & Shah, C 2000, *Student flows through Australian TAFE courses*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Golding, B & Volkoff, V 1998, 'Participation in VET in Australia: Different drives, same needs?' in *Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training*, eds F Ferrier and D Anderson, NCVER, Adelaide.

Gonczi, A 1998, 'The potential destruction of the vocational education and training system', in *Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training*, eds F Ferrier and D Anderson, NCVER, Adelaide.

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) 1998, *Measurement of vocational education and training outputs*, NCVER, Adelaide.

——1999a, *Student outcomes survey 1999—National report*, NCVER, Adelaide.

——1999b, *Student outcomes survey—in summary*, NCVER, Adelaide.

——1999c, *Multivariate analysis of WADT module load completion rates*, NCVER, Adelaide.

——1999d, *Australian VET statistics 1998: In detail*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Robinson, C 1999, 'New skills, new pathways: Lifelong learning is the key', paper presented to the Lifelong Learning Network's first National Conference, Canberra August 1999, <lllnetwork.canberra.edu.au/lll/PUBLICATIONS/RobinsonNewskills.htm> [accessed: February 2000].

Schofield, K 1997, 'Taking care of business: Social justice and the training market', *Training Agenda*, vol.4, no.3, quoted in *Competition and market reform in the Australian VET sector: Review of research*, ed. D Anderson, NCVER, Adelaide.

Seddon, T 1998, 'Practices and possibilities of institutional redesign in Australian education and training', paper for the AARE Annual Conference, October, Adelaide, <www.aare.edu.au/index.htm> [accessed: October 1998] (Paper Code: SED98354).

Appendix 1

Focus groups

Three focus groups were held to canvas the views of previous TAFE diploma students. They were convened in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney on March 27th, 28th and 29th 2000 respectively.

Forty participants were recruited by an independent market research company and included previous TAFE students who had completed, partly completed or discontinued advanced diplomas, diplomas or associate diplomas, preferably in the last three years (five years maximum). It was also specified that participants include both males and females, cover as wide a cross section of courses as possible, and preferably be a mix of employed, unemployed and not in the labour force.

The group sessions combined a discussion approach with the completion of simple questionnaires. Three rounds of questions canvassed: decisions to undertake TAFE diploma level study, decisions to continue or discontinue the course, and outcomes of the study. These were backed up with simple questionnaires.

The sessions were recorded on audio tape.

Thirty-nine participants attended the focus groups, 24 males and 15 females. Twenty-four of the participants had completed their diploma level course, whilst 15 had only partially completed their studies at this level.

The Melbourne group was the youngest of the focus groups, with half of the 14 participants under 24 years old. It had the highest proportion that did not complete their course (57%).

The Adelaide group was the oldest group, with half the group (5/10) being 35 or over, and had the highest completion rate (80%).

The Sydney group tended to be of an older age group with 6 of the 15 being 35 or over. A third (5/15) did not complete their diplomas.

A broad range of experiences and outcomes occurred for the participants, based on different needs and courses. The Adelaide group was quite consistent in their views and attitudes, with similar experiences and outcomes. They were older, studied for vocational reasons, achieved their aims, were employed and very satisfied with outcomes of training—a relatively conservative group and more realistic in their plans. Melbourne and Sydney participants were more mixed in their opinions and attitudes, but the majority in all cities were positive about their studies.

Were the needs and intentions of graduates different from partial completers?

The needs and intentions of participants, both those who graduated and those who decided to discontinue their TAFE diploma studies, were overwhelmingly vocational. There was a mixture of young people making the transition from school to older participants studying to broaden or improve skills. The completion of a diploma course was more related to the reality and specificity of training plans and objectives, rather than the needs or intentions themselves.

Young people leaving school were most at risk of not having clear or realistic vocational plans. One entered a course that was not designed for her career plans. Having completed her course she could not get a job that she had qualified for. She felt:

> *To become a veterinary nurse specific training was required—I had no intention of working in a job that I could walk straight into and hence out of—also it was expected that everyone when leaving school would go on to further education so I did; I have always been interested in animal care*

industries, hence vet nursing seemed like a good choice; the diploma I ended up doing I had NO idea what was involved (ended up doing Dip Applied Science—Animal Technology).

Another school leaver had very specific goals:

I believed that TAFE would give me the required skills and contacts to develop relations and work ethics within the multi media industry; I had been involved with freelance digital art for a number of years, wanted to enhance my existing skills and continue further into university and the industry.

He had problems, however, with his TAFE teacher and was impatient with the changes he described in his course which was still in its early development. His reason for discontinuing was: '[I] did not get on with the teacher'.

Other young people had clear plans and the ability to stick with the longer TAFE diploma courses, graduating and achieving their objectives:

I felt the TAFE course would give me a good insight into the job of a travel consultant along with an insight into the industry as a whole. Also a lot of employees look for industry experience or the completion of a course; the Diploma of Tourism course covered all relevant subjects which I felt would give me a good insight into the industry and I felt the subjects would benefit me in the job.

[I] wanted to get into the workforce and start earning money so I could travel; I knew I was good with computers, good with people and this job seemed like a good place to start. I did not know which way I wanted to go, I missed out on uni and this seemed like an interesting course covering different aspects in business.

Several students took a diploma course at TAFE because they did not get an offer of a university place, their first choice. Two of three in these circumstances did not continue the diploma when they were offered a university course. One student, who took up an offer for university, said:

Initially I didn't get into uni, so I intended to do the course to gain extra qualifications. Also to see if I liked the industry and whether it would be worth going to uni; wanted to get into tourism, this was the best choice at the time.

Another student, decided not to take up a late offer of university, saying he had 'a personal interest in art but knew that fine art is not a booming career path, so I had the intention of pursuing a visual communications degree after TAFE'.

Other diploma students already in the workforce were given encouragement or assistance from their employers. Whilst this encouragement was a factor in their decision to do a diploma course, participants said that their decisions to undertake courses were their own, rather than a requirement of employers or on the advice of careers advisers or counsellors:

I wanted a more responsible role at work; I was encouraged by my employer and was working in a section that related to my course.

To improve my situation at work; [they] recommended it—[it] would improve my career prospects now and later.

It was interesting to note that many participants had started courses with employer support, either time off work and/or financial assistance through payment of fees. Many of these participants noted that this support had been either withdrawn, or was no longer offered as an incentive to begin training. These included participants from Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney, and were older students who had started their studies in the early and mid 1990s.

Training to obtain skills for current jobs was the most frequent reason given for undertaking training by the focus group participants. These responses came from module completers who needed specific skills for a job and for promotion, as well as from those who graduated.

One module completer had very specific plans only to complete certain modules of a diploma course, associated with the skill needs of his current job, or a job on offer in his workplace. Asked why he decided to undertake a diploma with TAFE and why he didn't complete? This

student answered: 'To advance in my present and future jobs; and it wasn't my aim [to complete]. I did specific modules for specific skills'.

Others who did not complete said:

I went from office clerk to an admin position and thought this course would enhance my knowledge; [by] moving into the admin side, forecasting, budgeting etc. [it] would be beneficial to the position and myself;

Another said:

I wanted to consolidate my knowledge and experience of working in the Early Childhood field and move towards a career in counselling children whether at school or in a family situation; Had heard this was an excellent course and would be a good initial study of the subject.

Graduates voiced similar vocational motivations:

In the banking industry they employ many graduates and to compete you need to show extra skills and abilities; the associate diploma I completed was specific to the banking industry.

I had entered my industry with a trade background so I needed additional skills in order to progress up the ladder; the course was directly associated with my job.

Career planning was a major reason for undertaking diploma study, either school leavers:

I was interested in journalism but it's very competitive to get in straight after high school so I did the diploma to help me get into another course (journalism); because the job prospects are better with a broad range of skills such as professional writing and editing.

or older participants trying to change careers. Again some completed their diploma:

[I] realised I needed to study to have a career within the public service; course material was of interest to me; I completed a personality test, which pointed me in this direction.

To do what I always wanted, and I wanted to be in interior design field as a career; and a change of my studies.

I undertook the marketing management course to develop a career; it was job related as I wanted to have a course behind me to be able to advance myself and get a job easily.

and others didn't: 'I wanted to change career from within my current job; and for the enjoyment of the subject, [I] felt that I had some given experience'.

Only one person studied a 'hobby' course (ceramics) and this was a long-term vocational goal anyway: '[I] wanted in-depth knowledge to have my own business on the side; I also wanted to have kids and stop my present work for the bank and be able to do ceramics from home'.

One participant studied with rehabilitation support and built on his trade background: '[I had a] bike accident, [I had]lots of knowledge but needed more in the management/clerical side; worked on my trade background, enhanced it and put it into use in the office environment'.

Why did diploma students quit if they didn't achieve their aims?

Changing circumstances such as getting a job, or family commitments or illness were the major reasons participants at the focus groups discontinued their studies:

As I was only doing the course to obtain employment. When I got a job I saw no need for the course any more.

Time—family commitments, study time, long hours at work.

[I] Have taken a year off to spend time with my young family.

Unable to commute due to illness.

Overall focus group participants felt positive about their TAFE endeavours. However, with module completers there was also evidence of dissatisfaction with TAFE, such as perceived poor teaching standards, changing of course structures mid-stream, timetabling of courses to fit in with people who work full time. For some module completers this made the TAFE diploma not worthwhile completing. Some stated:

[I was] appalled at the low teaching standards.

They cant teach.

[I] did not get on with the teacher.

Lecturers need to be more informed.

Got a job two weeks in, diploma did not help at all, found the information presented 'vaguely related to area of employment' within those two weeks.

Some thought their courses could be better designed:

A lot more thought, more experienced and knowledgeable teachers and efficient/effective structures [are needed].

Work commitments.

Times of TAFE were a problem.

TAFE needs to be more flexible in terms of time constraints.

Too many changes during the length of the diploma—need to be more flexible to suit peoples needs.

When I was in the process of leaving the course it was decided that the course should have a more theoretical approach to the subject—I think this was a positive step.

Participants described how TAFE change the course requirements and structure whilst they are undertaking the course. Whilst they understood the need for review and agreed with some of the changes, this was frustrating. Very few of those discontinuing their diploma course were followed up by TAFE.

Are smaller units of study and recognition more appropriate in terms of personal needs and the current labour market?

Smaller units of study and recognition were thought to be more appropriate where employers wanted specific skills for specific jobs or operators. However, most felt that having a qualification helped in the job market, that it could get people an interview, and that it proved they could stick at something. Overall these factors were regarded as more important than specific skills gained.

It has helped me get an interview for the job I want. Helped me get an understanding of marketing and confidence.

Went from being partially trained to fully trained. Experience and training invaluable in moving from one job to another. Able to lead team effectively, gave me the tools to be effective; gave me confidence.

I enhanced myself in my job, field and study. I have progressed. It helped me think out my future. I gained impetus to change direction.

However, in terms of gaining industry specific skills and knowledge there were mixed feelings about the need to complete a full course or part thereof:

I thought the course was run thoroughly and covered all major aspects of the industry. I gained a job at the end which was just what I hoped for.

Any specialised field would need some sort of qualification and this is what everyone needs to go through.

There were unnecessary subjects in the TAFE [diploma] course and many students thought it should've taken less time to complete.

In Adelaide, all except two completed and thought that this was the right thing to do—they saw the course as a complete unit, and the qualification as giving them a competitive edge in the labour market. The group felt fairly strongly that the diploma level course was appropriate as a whole, it represented a rounded and complete unit of study and qualification. It provided a lot of intangible benefits, not just of a vocational nature but in an educational sense also. The fact that smaller units of study were available for students and employers who wanted specific skills for specific jobs was seen as an adequate way of catering for these needs.

In some cases, diploma students, however, did have the intention only to study specific modules to gain skills specific to their current job, or they had been made an offer for university after studying at TAFE, which was in effect their second choice.

Some demographics:

- 15 females and 24 males attended the focus groups; 15 did not complete their diploma
- all had completed their studies in the past five years, 5 in 1995, 6 in 1996, 4 in 1997, 6 in 1998 and 15 in 1999
- seven were school leavers when they began their diploma studies, 15 had previous certificate level post-school qualifications, and 10 had degrees
- they came from a wide range of courses, including:
  - Accounting
  - Applied science—animal marketing management
  - Mechanical engineering
  - Multi media
  - Small business management
  - Social sciences
  - Sports studies
  - Surface coating
  - Tourism
  - Writing/editing
  - Technology
  - Arts
  - Asia Pacific marketing
  - Building
  - Business administration (medical)
  - Business banking and finance
  - Ceramics
  - Community services
  - Computer technology
  - Fine arts
  - Human resource management
  - Interior design
  - Library and information
  - Management

Appendix 2

Focus group discussion guide

Outcomes for VET diploma and associate diploma students project

Introduction:

- Introduce self.
- Introduce project—outline and aims.
- Introduce group *as having recently undertaken diploma level courses at TAFE.*
- Outline ground rules, *discussion open and informal.*
- Outline role of moderator to probe your thoughts, ideas and opinions *there are no right or wrong answers.*
- We want everyone to contribute.
  - As a group we want each of you to respect other's opinions if there is disagreement that is OK, we are not here to reach agreement or to debate issues.
  - As a group we want each of you to respect other's right to confidentiality/ privacy and not identify other's opinions outside.
- The session is being taped for later analysis, the content of the tapes will be used for our analysis only, and your individual confidentiality will be preserved.
- We are issuing written exercises, again for later analysis, the content of which will also only be used for our analysis, your individual confidentiality will be preserved.
- Round-table introduction of participants, given name, course and year, and tell us whether you graduated or just completed the modules you wanted.
- Offer refreshments, then start discussion.

Outcomes for VET diploma and associate diploma students

Focus group:	Sydney [ ]	Melbourne [ ]	Adelaide [ ]		
Given name:					
Gender:	male [ ]	female [ ]			
Age group:	15 – 19 [ ]	20 – 24 [ ]	25 – 34 [ ]	35+ [ ]	
Name of diploma:					
TAFE college:					
Year of final study:	'99 [ ]	'98 [ ]	'97 [ ]	'96 [ ]	'95 [ ]
Did you study:	full time [ ]	part time [ ]	other [ ]		
Did you complete?:	Yes [ ]	No [ ]			
If not, why?					

Previous studies:	School:	Intermediate [ ] Final [ ]
Completed / partially completed:	Post-school	Certificate [ ] Diploma [ ] Degree [ ] Other [ ] please specify:
Current employment:	full time [ ]	part time[ ] unemployed [ ]
	Not looking for work [ ]	further study [ ]

▪ ISSUE 1: DECIDING TO UNDERTAKE A DIPLOMA COURSE

Lead in question

Thinking back to when you made the decision to take the diploma course, what factors influenced this decision? What were your reasons, your needs from the course and intentions regarding graduation and use of the qualification?

Allow group to brainstorm

Discussion questions and prompts

1. What were your training plans and intentions, how did this tie into your personal circumstances at the time you decided to take the course?
2. How did you plan to use your qualification?
   a for work—the job you had at the time,
   b to build a career on or to change jobs,
   c to move into another course, or
   d for other purposes? Please elaborate.
3. Did your employer require you to take the course? Was this to gain a formal qualification or to take specific modules related to the job you were doing?
4. Did you decide to study for a diploma after leaving school, based on careers advice or goals? Did the availability of work affect your decision to undertake a diploma? How realistic was the advice, were your plans achievable?

Underlying issue

Were the needs and intentions of graduates different from partial completers?

ISSUE 1: DECIDING TO UNDERTAKE A DIPLOMA COURSE:

Written exercise # 1:

Given Name:

1 What were your personal circumstances when you decided on the diploma course?

School leaver	
Working, with intention to build it into a career	
Working and wanting to change jobs or careers	
Unemployed	
Not in the workforce, wanting a career or job	
Not in the workforce studying for personal reasons	
Other:	

Please specify

2 Why did you decide to undertake a diploma with TAFE?

To get a job	
To gain necessary or extra skills for your existing job	
To get a better job or promotion	
To move onto a new career	
To get into another course of study	
Because of an external requirement	
To enhance family or social caring skills	
To enhance personal/living skills	

Can you explain this decision, to give us a better understanding (we need to know how specific or vague your reasons were):

3 Why did you choose your specific course?

Enjoyment of or talent in the subject matter	
Job related—first job	
Job related—second or subsequent job	
To gain entry to further study	
To gain skills for community/voluntary activities	
To gain skills for personal reasons	

Can you explain this choice, to give us a better understanding (we need to know how specific or vague your reasons were):

4 Any other comments?

ISSUE 2: THE DECISION TO COMPLETE OR DISCONTINUE YOUR DIPLOMA COURSE

Lead in question

How did you complete your diploma studies? Did you complete the course and gain a diploma qualification, or did you drop out of the course having completed only some of the modules. What factors were important in any consideration of discontinuing the course?

Allow group to brainstorm

Discussion questions and prompts

1. How long was your diploma course? Did the length of the course cause you to question its completion?
2. Were you satisfied with the advice you got regarding the course? Was it realistic and appropriate and how did it have an effect on your completion or discontinuation?
3. Were you happy with the course content, did it meet your needs? Did it exceed your or your employer's needs? How did the content of the course cause you to consider its completion?
4. Did changed personal or employment circumstances (e.g. family needs, a new or different job or retrenchment) make you question the completion of the course? How?
5. How did work pressures, or employer's assistance or lack of it (e.g. payment of fees, time off work) have an effect on your completion or discontinuation?
6. Did you complete the course or specific modules in order to gain entry or credits for another course? Is this a common occurrence in your experience? i.e. is the offer of a university place lure students away from TAFE?

Underlying issue

Why did you quit if you didn't achieve your aim?

ISSUE 2: THE DECISION TO COMPLETE OR DISCONTINUE YOUR DIPLOMA COURSE:

Written exercise # 2:

Given Name:

1 What did you think of your TAFE course? and its support services?

Did the course content meet your expectations?	
Was the course relevant to work, hobbies or other specific needs?	
Was the course length appropriate?	
Was information on the course, job prospects and careers accurate?	
Were timetables and locations manageable?	
Did you get job placement assistance or counselling?	
Was assistance forthcoming and helpful?	

Please elaborate on these answers:

2. Did you complete the full diploma course? Yes[ ] No [ ]

3. If you completed the course did you ever seriously consider discontinuing it? If so why?

4. If you only partially completed the course why did you choose to discontinue it?

Changed circumstances	
Personal reasons	
Work reasons	
Study reasons	

Please elaborate on these answers:

5. If you partially completed the course, did you intend to complete the diploma or just to complete just some modules when you enrolled?

   Intended to complete [ ] intended to do some modules only [ ]

Please elaborate on these answers:

6. Was there any follow up by TAFE as to why you discontinued or your future intentions?

   Yes [ ] No [ ]

7. Do you plan to resume and complete these studies in the future?

8. Any other comments?

ISSUE 3: OUTCOMES OF YOUR DIPLOMA COURSE

Lead in question

How did your diploma studies meet the needs you had to do the course? Did the completion of the course or the completion of particular modules give you the skills and competencies required for work or personal interests? Do you consider your endeavors and results as successful?

Allow group to brainstorm

Discussion questions and prompts

1. Did the completion or discontinuation make any difference to your employment, promotion or career goals? How did this effect your employment?
2. Did you require the qualification for licensing reasons or to perform your chosen career or voluntary activity?
3. Do you see courses as designed for employer's needs or administrative requirements rather than your own needs? Did this affect your study decisions?
4. If you partially completed the course, did the modules you took lead you to your goal in terms of career or personal needs?
5. Would an alternative course have been more appropriate?
6. Do you intend to complete your training at a later date?

Underlying issues:

Are smaller units of study and recognition more appropriate in terms of personal needs and the current labour market?

Are students enrolling in diploma courses doing so inappropriately?

ISSUE 3: OUTCOMES OF YOUR DIPLOMA COURSE:

Written exercise # 3:

Given Name:

1 Did you complete your TAFE diploma course or discontinue it?

Completed[ ] Discontinued [ ]

if you discontinued do you intend to complete in the future? Yes [ ] No [ ]

2 Do you consider your endeavors and results as successful? Yes [ ] No [ ]

3 In what ways did this effect your employment?

Got job	
Got better job or promotion	
Moved on to a new career	
Lost job, due to lack of qualification (or unable to get licence)	
No effect	

Please elaborate on these answers:

4 Could the course be better designed to meet the needs of both the students and employers?

Yes [ ] No[ ] How?

5 How did your course lead to the achievement of your specific needs at the beginning of the course:

Work/Career needs	
Personal needs	
Needs for further study	
Other	

6 Any other comments?

Thank you, for your assistance

Appendix 3

Table 21: Module completers—intention to complete, by sex, by reason for not completing

Main reasons for not continuing	Whether intends to complete training											
	Males				Females				Persons			
	Yes	*No*	*Unknown*	***Total***	*Yes*	*No*	*Unknown*	***Total***	*Yes*	*No*	*Unknown*	***Total***
Changed jobs or started a new job	521	93	0	**614**	163	453	0	**615**	684	545	0	**1 229**
I lost my job	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	**0**
I got the skills I needed for my job	242	0	0	**242**	3	168	0	**171**	245	168	0	**413**
Other employment reasons	449	74	165	**688**	603	225	220	**1 048**	1 052	299	385	**1 736**
I gained what I wanted from the training I had completed	87	508	40	**635**	164	156	0	**320**	251	664	40	**955**
I transferred to, or started, other training	128	223	9	**359**	320	249	0	**568**	447	472	9	**928**
The training no longer relates to my plans	8	510	58	**576**	126	334	0	**460**	133	844	58	**1 036**
The training was not what I expected	0	306	0	**306**	154	203	0	**357**	154	509	0	**663**
Training timetable not flexible enough me to attend class	586	6	162	**755**	645	462	154	**1 261**	1 231	469	316	**2 016**
Other training reasons (e.g. changes to training structure)	156	157	0	**313**	336	202	201	**739**	492	359	201	**1 052**
I moved from the area	132	45	0	**177**	55	5	0	**60**	187	50	0	**237**
Illness prevented me from continuing	592	45	0	**637**	102	151	0	**253**	693	196	0	**889**
Family reasons prevented me from continuing	231	0	0	**231**	498	480	41	**1 019**	729	480	41	**1 250**
Financial reasons prevented me from continuing	259	0	0	**259**	15	6	69	**89**	273	6	69	**348**
There were too many pressures on my time	174	20	39	**233**	599	382	0	**981**	773	401	39	**1 213**
Other personal reasons	402	13	0	**415**	479	315	96	**890**	881	327	96	**1 304**
Any other reason	549	366	0	**915**	589	785	32	**1 406**	1 137	1 151	32	**2 321**
Not stated	307	0	69	**376**	372	139	389	**900**	679	139	458	**1 276**
Total	**4 821**	**2 366**	**542**	**7 729**	**5 222**	**4 712**	**1 101**	**11 136**	**10 043**	**7 079**	**1 643**	**18 866**

Table 22: Graduates and module completers—employment outcome by field of study

Field of study	Labour force status after course							
	Employed full time	Employed part time	Total employed	Unemployed —looking for F/T work	Unemployed —looking for P/T work	Not in the labour force	Not stated/ refused	Total
Graduates								
Land and Marine Resources, Animal Husbandry	123	41	207	14	5	20	2	**248**
Architecture, Building	599	114	838	82	16	95	4	**1 036**
Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	596	632	1 473	248	120	343	14	**2 197**
Business, Administration, Economics	3 470	1 136	5 462	515	256	777	29	**7 039**
Engineering, Surveying	1 542	225	2 054	218	65	229	14	**2 580**
Health, Community Services	1 535	1 229	3 315	210	112	313	12	**3 961**
Law, Legal Studies	173	61	260	33	16	27	0	**337**
Science	641	216	989	218	53	200	5	**1 466**
Veterinary Science, Animal Care	30	15	51	6	4	2	0	**62**
Services, Hospitality, Transportation	611	567	1 518	112	50	113	11	**1 804**
VET Multifield Education	30	6	40	4	2	2	0	**48**
Unknown	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	**2**
Total	**9 351**	**4 240**	**16 210**	**1 662**	**698**	**2 121**	**90**	**20 781**
Module completers								
Land and Marine Resources, Animal Husbandry	194	0	194	0	0	0	0	**194**
Architecture, Building	287	7	363	111	0	0	0	**473**
Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	1 008	525	1 878	146	33	616	0	**2 673**
Business, Administration, Economics	3 974	887	5 846	270	83	573	137	**6 909**
Engineering, Surveying	1 067	480	1 811	40	0	259	0	**2 110**
Health, Community Services	584	419	1 274	189	5	98	0	**1 566**
Law, Legal Studies	147	81	229	0	0	0	0	**229**
Science	1 120	121	1 496	98	61	73	0	**1 728**
Services, Hospitality, Transportation	433	276	847	101	8	250	0	**1 206**
VET Multifield Education	269	224	682	159	50	892	0	**1 783**
Total	**9 083**	**3 020**	**14 619**	**1 114**	**239**	**2 761**	**137**	**18 870**

Note: There were no module completers recorded in several fields of study

Table 23: Employment outcomes by gender and industry, graduates and module completers, numbers and percentages

	Graduates				Module completers			
Industry	Males	Females	Males %	Females %	Males	Females	Males %	Females %
Agriculture	86	49	0.9	0.4	133	9	1.7	0.1
Mining	113	24	1.2	0.2	190	5	2.5	0.0
Manufacturing	1 028	450	10.9	4.0	1 336	436	17.3	3.9
Electricity/gas/water	121	41	1.3	0.4	31	0	0.4	0.0
Construction	507	121	5.4	1.1	417	152	5.4	1.4
Wholesale	222	190	2.4	1.7	378	778	4.9	7.0
Retail	746	964	7.9	8.5	392	1 138	5.1	10.2
Accommodation/cafés/restaurants	428	761	4.6	6.7	488	247	6.3	2.2
Transport	238	207	2.5	1.8	253	76	3.3	0.7
Communication	182	75	1.9	0.7	94	222	1.2	2.0
Finance/insurance	275	351	2.9	3.1	6	684	0.1	6.1
Property/business services	1 217	1 102	12.9	9.7	961	1 098	12.4	9.9
Government/administration/defence	445	230	4.7	2.0	98	394	1.3	3.5
Education	290	606	3.1	5.3	405	1 255	5.2	11.3
Health/community services	341	2 500	3.6	22.0	138	456	1.8	4.1
Cultural/recreational services	180	303	1.9	2.7	181	26	2.3	0.2
Personal/other services	237	269	2.5	2.4	299	338	3.9	3.0
No response	2 758	3 122	29.3	27.5	1 930	3 822	25.0	34.3
Total	**9 414**	**11 367**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**7 729**	**11 136**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Note: 1 module completer excluded as no details of gender available

NCVER

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research is Australia's primary research and development organisation in the field of vocational education and training.

NCVER undertakes and manages research programs and monitors the performance of Australia's training system.

NCVER provides a range of information aimed at improving the quality of training at all levels.

ISBN 0 87397 776 9 print edition
ISBN 0 87397 777 7 web edition